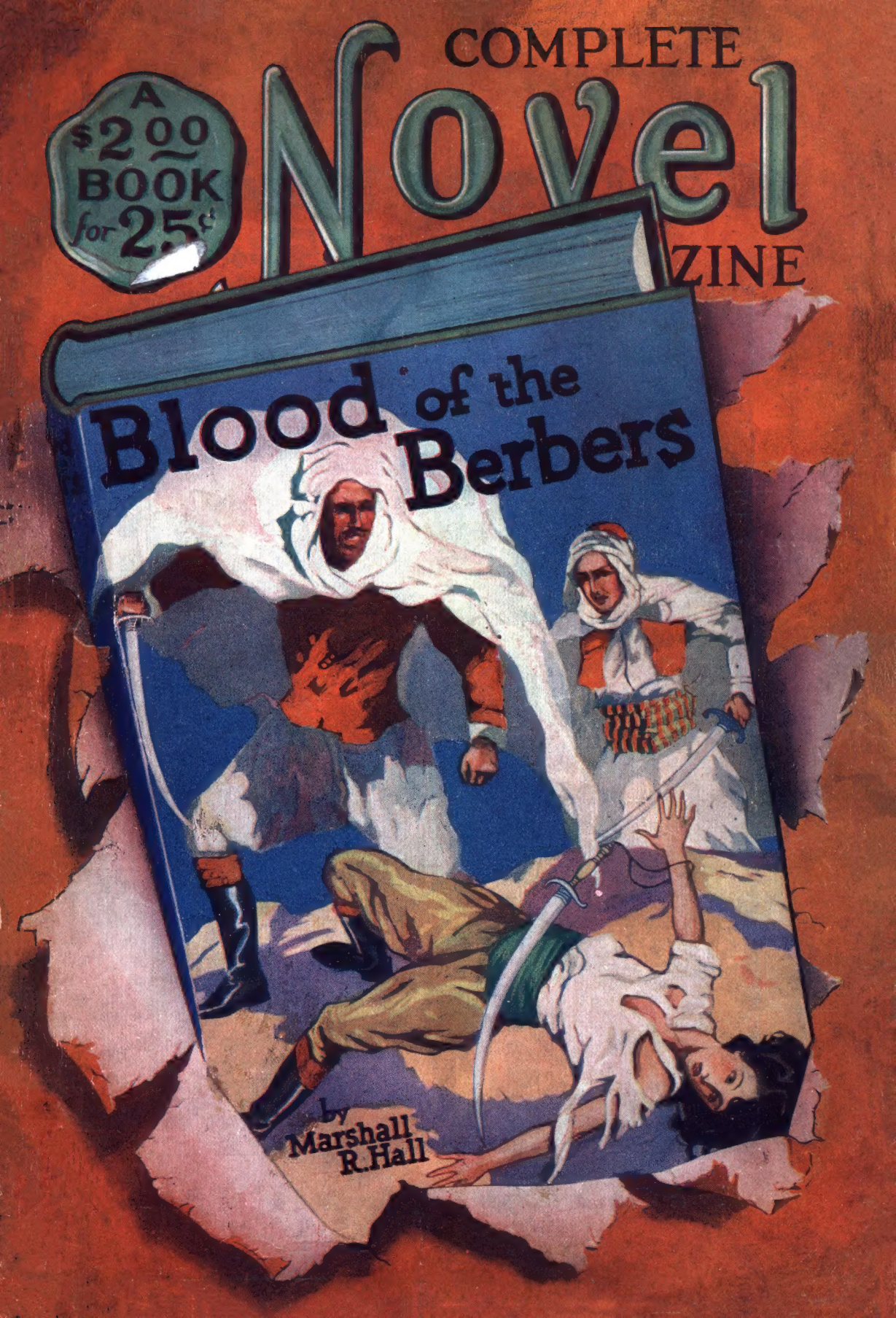
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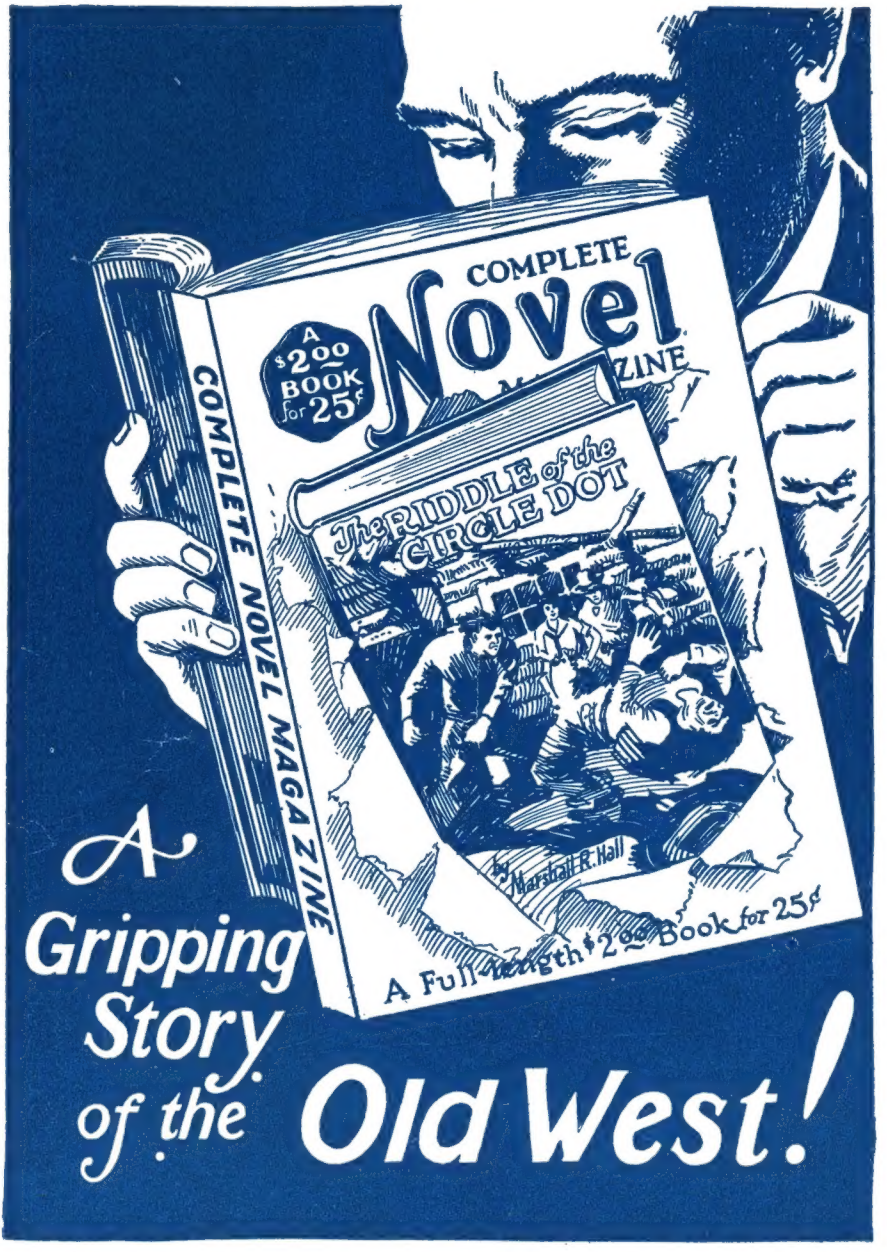
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With a start he realized that Allal Abdi, his companion and comrade, was a girl

Blood of the Berbers

by Marshall R. Hall

CHAPTER I

THE SUMMONS

GRENFALL waited until the telephone had ceased its jangling summons, then lifted the receiver.

"Larry Grenfall speaking," he said.

At once a voice sounded in his ear—a voice he had not heard before in years, and whose tones caused his pulses to quicken with anticipation.

"It is wonderful to hear you speaking again, Larry," he heard trickle over the wire and through the receiver. "Do you recognize me? Wait—don't speak my name; merely say yes, or no."

Something in the voice caused Grenfall to stiffen, but he answered steadily:

"Yes."

"Ah, dear friend; I knew you would. It has been ten years, has it not? But I've no time for sentiment now. I want to see—must see you."

"No more than I want to see you, B—" He checked himself on the name, then went on: "old man. But where, in the name of all that is mysterious, are you?"

"At what has been my home for almost a year, Larry. Listen: Giles will be in front of your apartments shortly with a cab—perhaps he is waiting there now. I tried to give him sufficient time to arrive before I called you. Join him, old friend, and he will guide you to me. Don't fail me, for you are the only man in the world I care to have with me on this my last night."

"Great Scott, what do you——" but a click on the wire and a sweetly murmured "Number, please!" apprised him the line was dead; that the man on the other end had hung up!

Dazed, Larry placed the receiver back on the hook and stood, his brain whirling, thoughts racing. Then he walked swiftly to his window and looked out on the street.

A taxi-cab, its driver huddled in his seat, collar turned high above his ears, stood at the curb. A driving snow, swirling as gusts of wind tossed it, was whitening the street and Larry shivered in involuntary dread of facing the wintry blast outside.

But not for long. He turned from

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the window and made a rapid change into heavy things.

Twenty minutes from the time he had received Ben Mansour's summons he heard the lock of his door click behind him and lowered his head to face the driving gale outside.

At Larry's appearance the chauffeur straightened himself, grasped the steering wheel, and prepared to shift the gears. Grenfall, reaching the curb, saw the door next to him swing open. Two seconds later he was inside. A solitary figure, bundled in a great furry coat, slammed the door behind him and spoke:

"Lor', Mr. Grenfall, but it's fine to see you again. 'Ere, 'ave a portion of this blanket. 'E was insistent that I bring one, because, 'e said, it'll be cold in them cabs, Giles, and you'd best see that Mr. Grenfall's comfortable."

"Giles, old fellow, you are a sight for weary eyes, upon my word," said Grenfall. "It was in Fez, ten years ago Christmas, that I last saw you and Mansour, was it not?"

Giles nodded.

"How has it fared with you betimes?" Larry went on.

"I can't say that I've not been 'appy, Mr. Grenfall, though we have done more 'n enough changin' from place to place; but I was hordered not to talk, sir, and I 'ope you won't be insistin' on me answerin' of your questions, if you please, Mr. Grenfall."

"But there are some things I must know now, Giles; things that I cannot wait to ask Mansour. Tell me, first, where are we going?"

"To Brent Lake, over in Jersey, to Mr. Mansour's 'ouse, sir."

"Brent Lake?" Larry echoed. "By Jove, that's a new one on me, and I've lived most of my life in New York, too. Where is Brent Lake?"

"It's just the name of the hestate Mr. Mansour 'as rented, Mr. Grenfall, that's all. It ain't so far after we get across the river."

"Is Mansour well, Giles?"

"'E seemed in good 'ealth when I left, save that 'e appeared a bit worried, sir."

"Why should he be worried?" Larry questioned, glancing from the window at the whirling white flakes, sensing that the chains on the wheels were making an infernal clattering.

"I can't say, sir, if you'll be so good as to excuse me, sir," Giles answered, and Larry, bursting with impatience, questioned him further and at length, but Giles, like the faithful servitor that he was, evaded direct answers until finally Grenfall, respecting the man's obedience, desisted.

When next he looked from the cab he saw they were in Jersey, speeding along a little frequented road. He could see little through the windows, however, it was so dark, and straight ahead the spotlight on the cab lit a vista of swirling snowflakes that seemed to leap at them out of the wall of the night. The cab was proceeding slower now, evidently because the driver was not familiar with the road. After an hour of this Giles tapped on the window that separated them from the driver and motioned with his hand. The cab came to a skidding stop.

"We get out 'ere, sir, and we 'ave a bit of a walk a'ead of us, if you won't mind, Mr. Grenfall," Giles said, and as he spoke he alighted and drew from a capacious pocket in his overcoat two bills of large denomination. These he passed to the driver.

"'Ere, cabby, take these and keep the change. You 'ave jolly well earned them."

Shivering in the cold, Larry watched the cab turn and dash back through the night, it's tail light winking through the swirl of the storm and the blackness; then it vanished and he turned to find Giles offering him the blanket.

"Put it hon, sir; I 'ave an extra coat under this 'n and will be quite warm, Mr. Grenfall. We 'ave a bit of a walk, as I told you."

Giles strode off briskly, and, lowering his head, Larry stayed close behind him.

For what Larry termed to be fifteen minutes they walked thus. The

rip of the wind had a weakening effect, and soon he felt his muscles reacting to the strain; he wondered how Giles, who was barely half his own size, could stand it.

Then, straight ahead, he saw a red eye wink through the gale and sensed they were at the limousine. He felt Giles's hand fumbling at his arm and heard the man's voice, speaking guardedly:

"'Ere, Mr. Grenfall, take this automatic. It's the master's horders, sir, that I 'and it to you, 'im thinkin' perhaps you wouldn't 'ave one of your hown."

Hiding his amazement, Larry took the black-muzzled weapon and dropped it in the wide pocket of his coat.

"Now, what on earth is that for, Giles?" he asked, barely able to keep his teeth from chattering as the chilling blast whipped about him, but Giles ignored the question, and was already beside the limousine, opening the door.

Inside the car as it rolled smoothly off through the night he clutched Giles by the shoulder.

"Tell me, now; what was the motive for handing me that gun? What danger do you, or Mansour, anticipate?"

"Please, Mr. Grenfall, I can't say a thing."

The curtains were drawn across the glass partition that separated them from the driver's seat and Larry, leaning forward, said:

"You win, Giles, but I wish to heaven I could see where we are. This infernal storm and the blackness of the night——" He was interrupted by a fearful, choking cry from Giles.

Under Larry's hand the curtains had swung from the glass and the dim outlines of two turban-covered heads were visible against the wall of light the head lamps were throwing along the road!

"Your gun, your gun, Mr. Grenfall; shoot them as you would dogs," he heard Giles saying.

"It's them 'e was afeard of, sir; we ain't goin' along the right road at all. It's lucky you drew the blinds, Mr. Grenfall."

"Good God, Giles; what are you driving at?" Larry cried, exasperation and wonder in his voice. Then he saw Giles drag from his own pocket a companion to the automatic he had recently passed to him, and before he could speak again or act he saw flame leap from the weapon!

A splintering of broken glass and startled yells followed, then the car spun crazily, leaving the road. Crashing into a hedge that lined the thoroughfare, the machine stopped. Larry visioned as in a nightmare two goblin figures hurtling from the driver's seat; saw them leap the hedge and vanish in the gloom.

Giles was out of the car and now his automatic was sending a steady stream of lead off through the night. Larry crawled out of the car.

Giles had ceased firing and now, breathing a deep sigh of relief, he turned a pale, worried countenance toward Larry.

"Lor', Mr. Grenfall; we've 'ad a narrow hescape. Can you drive a Pennant Twelve?"

"Certainly, Giles."

"Then, for 'eaven's sake, start the motor and let's be goin' away from this 'ere place."

Larry stepped to the chauffeur's seat, placed the gears in neutral, and touched the starter. The car's little mishap evidently had not harmed the motor, for it roared instantly. Setting the gears in reverse, and following Giles' waving hands for direction, he backed the car, shifted to low, swung back onto the highway, then went into the higher speeds as the road, illuminated by the powerful head lamps, spread out a good hundred yards or more before him.

Giles, huddled at his side, was silent until they passed a huge tree whose naked branches swept far out over the road.

"A 'undred yards a'ead, sir, our way swings to the left," he said, and Larry, slowing down, saw what appeared to be an abandoned lane. He swung into it, the huge, powerful car

taking the bumps with a smoothness that bespoke all that was modern in the way of shock absorbers.

"Straight a'ead now, sir," he heard Giles saying. "This road'll lead us directly to the 'ouse."

Half an hour later two squares of yellow light in a wall of utter blackness broke on their vision.

"'Ere we are, sir, and it's glad I am that I'm 'ere. I wonder if 'Enry was killed or kidnaped?"

"Who is Henry?" Larry asked as he stopped the car.

"'E was Mr. Mansour's chauffeur, sir; 'e was drivin' the limysine when I started to fetch you."

Before Larry could speak again Giles left him and hastened toward the yellow light-squares which, Larry saw now, emanated from two windows in a huge, rambling house. He saw Giles cross the veranda, then followed on his heels, joining him as he raised the huge brass knocker and tapped it thrice, distinctly, then twice.

Shivering, feet and legs numb, Larry stood beside Giles, waiting; then the door swung open and he saw, framed in the portal, the face and figure of Ben Mansour. With a glad cry he sprang forward, was drawn inside, and clasped in an embrace of whose warmth there was no doubting.

CHAPTER II

THE BAUSHEE NIGHT

LARRY followed Mansour into a great room, to a long, low divan that was pulled up close before a roaring wood fire. He felt his blanket and coat being taken from him; felt caressing hands force him downward until he was seated; felt, too, Mansour sitting down beside him and Mansour's arm going about his shoulders; he heard Mansour's voice:

"Giles, fetch a brandy peg for Mr. Grenfall, then you may go for the night."

Then Larry was looking into the piercing black eyes of his friend; heard him speaking:

"It was criminal of me to drag you through a night like this, Larry, and only a great, driving reason caused me to do so. I can't get over your fit appearance, though. When I last saw you, you were a beardless youth of seventeen; now you are twenty-seven, and while you have a more mature, powerful look about you, still I can see the old lines, those reckless, devil-may-care characteristics in your face. You haven't changed much, except in that way, and also that you have grown. You must be all of six feet now."

"Six feet one," Larry corrected him, his eyes devouring the lean, sharp features of the other; taking in the crisp, dark hair, short, pointed beard and jet-black eyes. "You have changed little yourself, Ben," he went on. "Hardly any, except that there is gray in your temples now and marks of worry in your face. Why, man, you *do* seem worried. Tell me, what is it?"

"There is plenty of time to tell you, Larry," Mansour answered, glancing at the tiny clock which ticked softly on the mantel above them. "It is now a quarter to twelve; I have until two before anything will happen. In that time we may say much. Tell me, first, about your books. I have read them all; your 'Chleuh as a Berber Dialect,' your 'Wizards of Morocco' and your 'Little Known Country of the Atlas.' Tell me, too, are you still studying Morocco?"

"I have devoted nearly all of the ten years that have elapsed since I saw you, Ben, to studying that mysterious country. Especially have I studied the magic of the land, the lore of its wizards which, I am convinced, surpasses anything that India or China ever produced. Partly for pastime and partly to strengthen my own knowledge of the black arts, I have practiced the magic of Morocco until I verily believe I can outwizard any wizard that ever wore turban and burnouse, or swore by

the Prophet's beard that he could grow a rose in the whiskers of a jackal."

"And I believe you, old fellow. You must have gone deeply into the dialects of the Seven Tribes, too, else you never could have written your 'Chleuh as a Berber Dialect.'"

"It is my thought that I know their dialects so well I could walk the length and breadth of Morocco, and, properly garbed, fool the Sultan himself and all his *kaids* and *khalifas* as to my true identity; I don't believe there is a *sherif* or a *sheikh* or an Edrissite in all the land of the Moors who could trip me up from my manner of speech, be it anything from pure Arabian to low Sus."

A cloud momentarily dimmed the brilliance of Mansour's eyes and almost, it seemed, a tinge of sorrow briefly softened his features. His voice came, low and abstracted:

"If I had not gathered as much from your books, Larry, I should not have summoned you here tonight, but would have made my passing alone."

With a quick, rushing shock of memory Larry straightened.

"By gad, Ben, you spoke queerly over the telephone tonight. Now, tell me what is wrong, else I'll not say another word about myself. Are you in trouble?"

"Not in the sense you mean, dear friend," and Mansour's voice was as mellow as old wine.

"But you said over the phone that you wanted me here with you on your last night, and just now you hinted again that you are to die tonight. Now, by all that is holy, I've seen more mystery so far this night than I ever encountered in all Morocco, a land of mystery."

Before Mansour could reply, Giles entered, bearing a tray on which set two brandy pegs. The servitor looked calmly at his master.

"They killed 'Enry, sir; leastwise, them's my suspicions. Two with turbans, and they was drivin' off the limysine when me and Mr. Grenfall reached it. They ran when we fired, and I 'aven't 'eard or seen anything of 'Enry."

If Larry had expected the announcement to startle Mansour, he was disappointed.

"I feared something of the kind might happen, Giles. Now, you may go for the night. If I do not summon you in the morning, Mr. Grenfall will call you for me, and I want you to do whatever he tells you, just as though I were giving the orders. Will you do that for me, Giles?"

"Lor' bless us, Mr. Mansour, and you know that I will."

Giles turned from the room, dimming the lights as he departed. Larry, sipping his warming drink, looked at Mansour and found the latter's eyes staring fixedly at the window. He was about to follow his gaze, when Mansour turned and looked directly at him.

"Look toward the window and tell me if you see what I see."

Larry, moving his head swiftly, did as Mansour bade, and his heart gave a quick, pounding throb.

Pressed against the glass, with the blackness of the night and the swirling snowflakes as a background, was a lean, somber countenance, whose beady, black eyes glared directly at Ben Mansour; the fellow's head was covered by a towering white turban!

Before he had time to speak he saw Mansour go to the window and throw it open. Immediately the Moor stepped inside, bowing.

Larry heard Mansour speaking a mixture of guttural Chleuh and Berber.

"Well, son of a jackal, brother of filth, you have found me. Say what you have to say and be on your way, else I slay you like I would any snake in the hills."

"My life is in Allah's hands," the other said softly. "I bring a message, favored one; of a surety, you know its import."

"*Ohe,*" Mansour answered, "of a surety I know it." Swiftly his voice

changed and he spoke in the guttural Chleuh of the Berbers.

"But, speak!"

"Alone, *Moulay?* Or"—the Moor glanced at Larry— "in this man's presence?"

"Speak!" Mansour commanded. "This Christian, understands not the language of the Atlas," and Larry, taking the hint, allowed his face to assume a blank expression.

The Moor straightened and his voice rose in a sonorous chant:

"I am Tahar ber Rechid, *kaid* of the tribe of Adrar-n'-Oued, of the city of El-Ajmas, and I am here at the bidding of the Group. I bring a message from the Temple and I bring likewise a token, that you may know I speak with authority."

With a swift movement he drew from beneath his coat a small, oval box, inlaid with gold and ivory and delicately carved. He passed this to Mansour. The latter, with a deft motion of his fingers, threw it open. A ring of purest gold, set with a huge, blood-colored ruby whose fiery heart reflected from seemingly a thousand facets the dim lights of the room, was revealed!

Larry saw Mansour take it from its case, glance at it briefly, then carelessly toss it to a nearby table.

"Your proof is sufficient, Tahar ber Rechid," he said, and waited.

"I am commanded by the Group to speak to you, *Moulay*, offering you the choice of resuming your *sheriffdom*, joining *Moulay* Edriss by your own hand, or joining him——" He paused, significantly, the while his beady, black eyes blazed into those of Mansour.

"And if I choose to appoint another to honor my throne?" Mansour's voice was calm, despite the fact that he had just heard a sinister death threat. Larry interpreted the invitation to join *Moulay* Edriss in the only way it could be construed—*Moulay* Edriss had been dead these many decades.

"*Ai*, my lord," the other made response. "There is no other who may take your place, save only he whom the Group may select after you——" He paused again, leaving the sinister thought unuttered.

"Now, by the beard of the Prophet," Mansour roared, his eyes flashing, his lean form straightening, "am I a jackal of the hills, scouring for the filth of the tribal camps, that I must endure insolence from you, dog? Son of all that is vile, offspring of a thousand swine, go back to the Group, go back to the Temple, go back to the Atlas and take this word: 'The next *sherif* of the Seven Tribes will be my son.' Go!"

Larry started violently. Ben Mansour with a son? Before he could pursue his thoughts further, he heard the Moor again:

"*Moulay* must know that the answer will not satisfy; that in carrying it back I am not performing *fully* the mission I came here on. There is still in hand the business of——"

"Killing me," interrupted Mansour impatiently. "Well, begone, for I have anticipated you and three hours ago I swallowed *karas*. Is that sufficient for you?"

The other immediately made a low obsequy.

"You swear that you swallowed—?"

"I have told you," grated Mansour, and he pointed toward the window.

Larry, watching, in that instant sensed that Mansour was a Moor! And unless the signs were awry, he was high in the councils of his country. He had often suspected the man's nationality, but nothing Mansour had ever said or done had verified the suspicion; rather he had always intimated that he was what Larry first had taken him to be on the occasion of their initial meeting, in the French Club, at Fez—a well-to-do Englishman, touring for pleasure.

He watched the man of the turban step through the window, saw him turn and toss something inside. Mansour closed the window and picked up the thing the messenger had thrown back. Carelessly, he tossed it to Larry and the latter, catching it, turned it curiously in his fingers.

It was a tiny ivory replica of a

tiger, its claws distended and its body crouched ominously!

"What is it, Ben?" asked Larry.

"An image of the Striped Death," the other answered. He was looking at Larry with tired eyes, a lazy smile on his face.

"You heard, Larry?"

Grenfall nodded.

"I'm damned if this isn't first-rate stuff for a comic opera, Ben. Old man, if I didn't know better, I'd swear I was in Morocco this blessed minute, somewhere high in the Berber hills of the Atlas. Tell me, what, in the name of Allah, does it all mean?"

Mansour looked at the tiny clock.

"Time has flown," he said gently, his voice soft and mellow again. "It is nearly one-thirty. Well, I have slightly more than a half-hour in which to talk, but before I explain, I want to ask you a question: Will you do something for me that may endanger your very life?"

Despite the incongruity of the thing—for that matter, of this whole baushee night—Larry replied, instantly:

"Need you ask, my friend?"

Mansour's strong, lean hand dropped over the bronzed, muscular fingers of Larry and there was something in his touch that hinted somehow of renunciation and the great love of one man for another.

"Will you go to Morocco for me, Larry? Will you go into the Atlas, find the Temple, endure the Ordeal if need be and crush the Group? Will you recover at all costs a casket that is hidden in the Temple and give it to a man I shall name?"

"I don't understand a thing you have said, Ben Mansour, but if it will help you or ease your mind, I promise that I shall do all I can to carry out any wishes you may have. But, tell me, why?"

"Because," Mansour's voice was low and husky, "unless Omar ben Medjad has in his possession the casket on the eve of the *mouloud*, a most wonderful boy will lose his birthright."

Larry pondered. The *mouloud*, he knew, was the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet.

"Who is Omar ben Medjad, and where shall I find him?" he asked.

"He is a shop-keeper in a side street that leads from the market place in Ab Dukkar. You will go to Ab Dukkar first and you will find in the street a Doukkala mendicant, crying for alms. Ask him the way to Omar's and trust him, for he will be faithful."

"But where is this Temple?" Larry queried desperately. What is the Ordeal and what is in the casket? Oh, damn it, man, can't you see what a superlative mystery you are tonight, and what a superlative riddle——" He broke off, staring at Mansour, over whose face a great change had come on the instant. His eyes were growing heavy and dull and a pallor was spreading across his face. With an effort, he roused himself, briefly, and smiled wanly, lazily it seemed, at Larry.

"Too late—can't talk more—going—open chest—remember mendicant Omar—boy—Temple—I'm sleep—"

Larry caught his friend in time to save him from pitching forward into the fire. Gently he laid him back on the divan and grasped the untasted brandy peg Mansour had left. But already the man's teeth were clenched and his staring eyes glazed. He was breathing so faintly that his chest movements were not visible. Larry glanced instinctively at the clock. It was two minutes until two!

Raising his voice, he summoned Giles, who appeared almost on the instant, fully clothed, as though he had, like a faithful watch-dog, been sleeping just beyond the door, on guard. One glance at Mansour, and Giles wailed:

"That's what 'e meant, sir, when 'e said I was to take my orders from you this mornin'. My Lor', sir, they've poisoned 'im. 'E told me once this might 'appen any time and that if it did I was not to worry, but was to hopen 'is trunk the very minute I was sure 'e was gone. 'E said there

was letters there I must take care of."

The clock chimed twice, mellow, musically. Larry felt his friend's forehead and found it cold. His hand fumbled across Ben Mansour's chest, but could detect no heart-beat. He turned to Giles.

"Open the trunk and fetch the letters, then, Giles. Our friend, the man we both loved, is dead."

He dropped on his knees beside the body, his eyes filmed with unshed tears, and a short Berber prayer flitted through his mind. Kneeling thus, he uttered it above his dead friend.

CHAPTER III.

GRAY DAWN—AND AFTER

GRENFALL was aroused by the return of Giles. The man was visibly grief-stricken and now a new trouble seemed added to his woes.

"Mr. Grenfall, 'is trunk ain't a trunk at all; that is, I mean to say, sir, when I opened it I found it 'eld only a chest of some outlandish sort, and I'm blessed if I can make out any way to open it."

Silently, Larry rose and followed Giles. The servant led the way up a flight of stairs, to a bedroom with appointments so Oriental that Grenfall could almost have believed himself at that moment in the heart of Morocco, or Araby. In a corner he glimpsed the trunk, its lid thrown open, while beside it on the floor was a square chest, heavily carven.

Giles pointed to the chest. "There don't appear to be any lock on it."

Still silent, Larry dropped to his knees beside the box, his eyes lighting with interest. He recognized it as a chest whose lid opened only through manipulating secret springs; it was of a pattern popular among the *shorfa* of Morrocco, who used them as treasure chests.

He ran his fingers over the carving, pressing tentatively here and there, seeking for a crack that might indicate where the lid opened; but he looked in vain. After an hour he had exhausted every idea he had as to how the box opened. He had used every artifice he had picked up in his studies of Morocco, but in the end he rose, baffled, and turned to Giles.

"Fetch a hatchet, or a hammer, Giles, I'm afraid we shall have to burst it open."

With the words he stooped to lift the box, in order that he might set it more conveniently for the contemplated battering. Grasping either end, he straightened, and nearly fell over backward. The upper framework of the chest had come loose in his hands, allowing the bottom to drop out. Somehow, he had manipulated the springs without having been aware of it.

Together they began exploring the contents. Larry dropped his hand on a heavy, stiff-paper packet, lifting it to glance at the superscription. It was addressed to Giles, and without a word he handed it to the servitor, who ripped it open with shaking fingers.

"'Ere, Mr. Grenfall, part of it is for you. See, this envelope says: 'Giles, deliver this to Mr. Grenfall.'"

Larry grasped the envelope, opening it with a quick motion of his muscular fingers. Several sheets of paper dropped out and he saw that for the most part they were legal instruments directing disposal of Mansour's estate after certain things were settled. One sheet bequeathed to Giles a sum of money that fairly staggered the little man, then Larry picked up a page that was meant for his eyes only. This he read last:

When you read this, dear friend, I will have passed from the life that you know. The inclosed instructions will care for all affairs I leave behind me that concerns the world you and I have known in the course of our friendship. It is my desire that Giles take his share, return to England, buy himself a fine house and live out his life in comfort, and may Allah be with him, for he was a faithful friend and a competent man. As for you, friend of my heart, I have already told you, I hope, what I wish you to do for me. If it chances that my passing comes before I see you, then, *kismet!* and perhaps it is just as well. But if I have told you—and you alone will know

now—I urge you with all my heart to carry out my last desires.

Above all things, find the Temple and give to Omar ben Medjad the casket I have already told you about. Omar will restore its contents, the Sacred Eye, to he who must have it, for without it, no man may rule in Barbary.

Now, dear friend, farewell, as you Americans say, until we meet again.

Sherif OMAR BEN MANSOUR EL-MASMAZI.

The letter finished, Larry let his eyes linger on the signature. Here, Mansour had revealed his true identity; he was a *sherif* in Morocco and if one could judge by what had already transpired this night, he was a very powerful *sherif*.

Familiar as he was with Morocco and its history, Larry had never entertained any fancies about Mansour's name, thinking, of course, that the first name was Benjamin. The man was dark, but no darker than Grenfall himself; which is no unusual thing among the Berbers, who are of the white race, and never by word or deed had he intimated he was anything other than what he had always pretended to be to Larry—a cultured English gentleman.

Pondering over what Mansour had told him and thinking, too, of the letter, Larry awoke suddenly to a realization that the man had made absolutely no detailed mention of the Temple; on the other hand, he had made the puzzle in Larry's mind more confusing.

It was very perplexing, and to make matters worse, if that were possible, there was not to be had a clue of any sort that might help to clarify the situation. Perhaps, if he could round up one of the turbaned Moors of the limousine, or the fellow who had brought the token and the message, he might force from him, or them, some information that would dissolve the mists that hovered over all the events of the crazy, eerie night.

On second thought, he imagined that to capture one of the turbaned men would do little good, especially if there were anything of a religious nature connected with their presence here. A Moor would die rather than yield up any word that might be deemed inimical to his religious beliefs. For a long time Larry conversed with Giles, seeking to learn all he could from the little man that might be helpful in understanding the present state of affairs, but Giles, it turned out, knew little or nothing about Mansour's real life and activities. In the end Larry gave it up and rose.

"We must allow things to remain as they are until after the funeral, I imagine, Giles. Then, since it was Mansour's wish, it will be best that you go to England. For the present, we will return to the dining-room and fetch his body here."

He stooped and set the lid of the chest in place, then he followed Giles, reaching the stairs in time to hear a startled call:

"Quick, Mr. Grenfall; 'urry, sir!"

Larry dashed into the room and found Giles standing with ashen face and shaking knees, pointing to where Mansour's body had been lying on the divan an hour earlier. At the same instant Larry was conscious of a cold draft blowing on him. Then he re-echoed Giles' cry of bewilderment.

Ben Mansour's body was gone!

A window—the one which had admitted the messenger—was standing open and through this came chilling gusts of wind and swirling snow. Outside the gray dawn was beginning to break across the Jersey flats.

Larry reached the window with a half-dozen swinging leaps, then was out in the storm, seeking footprints in the drifting snow. As well to have sought a certain grain of dust in a sand storm. The high wind and constantly falling snow had obliterated every trace the vandals' feet might have made.

Dashing around the corner of the house, Larry looked toward the spot where he had left the limousine. It, too, was gone!

Despair in his heart, resolved to call the police as quickly as he could reach Mansour's telephone, he re-

turned to the house, closing the window behind him tightly. Already Giles had a fresh fire kindled on the hearth. Larry started for the telephone and was interrupted by Giles' voice, coming from the hearth:

"As soon as the fire gets a-goin' a little better, Mr. Grenfall, we'll 'ave a bit of 'ot coffee," he said. Larry was amazed at the matter-of-factness of the man.

"Great heavens, Giles!" he exclaimed, "how can you speak of coffee when——"

Giles' uplifted hand, from which a piece of paper fluttered, stopped him. The little servitor rose to his feet now and handed this paper to Larry.

"Read it, sir, and you'll see why I 'ave ceased to worry about 'is body."

Larry flipped the paper open in front of him and read a few lines of badly scrawled English.

Fear nothing. We take our Sherif's body home and nothing shall stop us. We will give him the honor due to a Lord of the Believers. It will do no good to seek us for we take the body to Barbary; and you cannot find us.

The missive was unsigned, but evidently it had been written hastily by one of the turbaned men who had made the night one of mystery. He thrust the paper in his pocket, his mind a jumble of fears and fancies, his brain over-keen because of the horrors of the night. He realized that Giles' attitude had been the only proper one to take, as a result of the message, for knowing the Moors as he did, he knew that they would use every wile, resort to every sacrifice, to carry out their ends. He did not fancy now that it would be well to arouse the police and have them seek the fellows. No, it probably would come to pass that Ben Mansour would be more honored when buried by his own kind than if the funeral was held here.

"I think, after all, you are right in not worrying, Giles. Prepare the coffee, by all means—also, some sandwiches. Strange that we heard nothing when they were taking Mansour's body out; stranger still that we did not hear the motor of the Pennant Twelve when they drove off with it."

"I don't know as I'd call it strange, sir," Giles ventured. "The storm was 'owlin' somewhat fierce, if you recall, Mr. Grenfall, and it'd deaden the sound of the motor."

"We'll let that pass for the present, Giles. While you prepare us a bite, I shall go back and search the chest. Supposing you fetch my share of the food to me there."

"Very good, sir," said Giles, and turned from the room.

If Larry had expected to find anything in the chest that he had not previously seen, he was doomed to disappointment. For the most part it held only small personal trinkets of Mansour's and a few gold coins. Among what he imagined had been Mansour's personal jewels he discovered a small, golden musk balsam flower of seven petals, and on the tip of each petal was a faint, Islamic symbol. These he examined carefully. After a time he looked up and muttered softly:

"The Seven Marabouts of the Seven Tribes."

Looking closely at the symbols again, his face lighted:

"Beyond the Atlas—by Jove, that's it—the Seven Tribes of the Berbers—the seven principal tribes. Could Mansour have been the *sherif* over these? It looks as if he had."

He dropped the trinket in his pocket as Giles entered with sandwiches and coffee, then, his mind going backward to earlier in the night, he bade Giles set the things down and serve them, then dashed from the room.

The Token was where Mansour had thrown it, and even the gray dawn that was now flooding the room could not smother the hot fires that pulsed in the ruby's heart, where it reflected back the tossing flames on the hearth. Larry picked up the ring and slipped it on his finger. As though obeying some instinct, he turned the stone toward his palm. Silently he rejoined Giles and gulped down scalding cups of black coffee.

"I shall return to my apartments, Giles," he said, when, his brain cleared by the potent strength of the coffee, he shoved back his chair. "As for you, I fancy it would be best for you to go directly to England, in accordance with Mansour's wishes. No doubt, this will never come to the attention of the authorities, and we shall, of course, say nothing ourselves. If you think you need me before you sail, come to my rooms, but you must hasten, for as rapidly as I can wind up some personal affairs I shall do so, then I shall sail myself."

"You will be goin' abroad, Mr. Grenfall?"

"Aye, Giles; to Morocco."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DOUKKALA MENDICANT

A FILTHY, travel-worn Doukkala mendicant entered the Market of the Pilgrimage in Ab Dukkar, and squatted down in the full glare of the setting sun, composing himself for the purposeless and seemingly interminable vigil so peculiar to the vocation of his kind. His black, beady eyes, darting about the market place, lighted on a window in a nearby coffee shop and held there. For an hour he did not move.

Then the window opened and a head peered forth. The red ball of the sun was dropping swiftly and already the fitful night life of the place was beginning to waken and stir. The man in the window glanced around, apparently not seeing the mendicant. Casually, slowly, he drew a corner of his brown burnouse across his brow, then disappeared inside. The window closed behind him.

Not until a whining, singsong voice in a nearby minaret called the *maghreb* did the mendicant change his position, but as the summons to sunset prayer sounded across the market place he hastily dropped to his knees, his forehead bowed to earth. For many long minutes he remaind thus, then the voice of the muezzin came again and the prayer was ended. The mendicant resumed his squat posture.

After a time he became aware of another figure squatting beside him. Slowly the mendicant turned his head, taking in the other. Neither, until that time, apparently had realized the other's presence. Now, after a brief glance, the mendicant turned his gaze away and resumed his stare at the coffee-shop window.

For a half-hour they sat silently, the mendicant and the man beside him. Lights had sprung up and the milling crowds, ever moving, seemingly with no destination, jostled and shoved about the market place, surrounding the stalls, but seldom buying. Then the newcomer's lips moved, but only the mendicant could hear the guttural Chleuh that dropped from the man's lips:

"Tell me, Abdu; he has not come?"

The mendicant's hand, long-nailed and filthy, rose to his face. From behind it he spoke, guardedly, shielding his lips:

"Not yet."

"I go, Abdu, to the shop of Omar ben Medjad. The stranger is here. He will come soon. Send him to me at once."

"If Allah wills that the stranger pass this way, he shall also come to you."

Another half-hour passed, then the newcomer drew his brown burnouse about him, lowered his gaze and moved off among the crowds in the market place. In an instant he was out of the mendicant's sight.

Larry Grenfall, walking slowly, entered the market place by way of the Gate of the Believers and strode down the Street of Crooked Ways. He had arrived less than two hours earlier, coming overland from the coast. As yet he had not even called on the commandant of the little fortress in the shadow of the hills, and he knew that his arrival had already been reported to the French *capitain* who commanded there; he knew, too, that unless he soon officially recorded his presence with the military he would be picked up by a blue-coat

soldier or one of the Partisan military police.

But he felt it was more important to locate Omar ben Medjad than to worry about the ethics for the present; and he had an idea that in case it became necessary he could, by getting in touch with Omar, pull some government strings. Hence, as soon as he stepped from the wheezy rickety little automobile that had transported him from Fez, he had started out directly to find the market place and the Doukkala mendicant Ben Mansour had mentioned.

He carried no baggage. It spoke volumes for his knowledge of Morocco and his confidence in himself that he came to Ab Dukkar, last outpost of the French strength in this land of mystery, with nothing save for the clothing he wore and the odds and ends which cluttered his pockets. Unless he had guessed wrongly, he would have need at once to live as the Moors live; in fact, to become a Moor in all save birth and religion, and even he would have to simulate those.

As he strode through the market place after leaving the Street of Crooked Ways he appeared at ease, as though he were a sightseer touring for pleasure. No one, watching him, would have surmised that he sought anyone or anything, in particular; therefore, if any was watching, he did not think it strange when the Doukkala mendicant rose supplicatingly and whined nasally:

"Alms, alms, in the name of Allah the Compassionate. Alms, alms."

Larry's heart bounded and he paused, fumbling in a pocket. Apparently he was having trouble finding change. The beggar's voice whined again:

"By the token, Allah shall bless the giver of alms, O lordly one; *by the token!*"

Larry suppressed a start. He had purposely fumbled about his pockets, expecting the mendicant to speak, to voice low-whispered directions as to where Omar ben Medjad's shop might be. Could the fellow be wanting proof that he was the one who would come seeking Omar? He wondered; then turning his hand he let the flickering glow from a sickly, nearby torch, fall on the palm. Briefly, the ruby reflected from its thousand facets the dull light. Now the mendicant spoke again, a low gasp:

"The Eye of the Prophet!"

Larry lowered his hand and thrust it back within his pocket. This time when it came forth it held a small piece of silver. He tossed it carelessly to the Doukkala beggar and heard his nasal whine again, interspersed with whispers:

"May Allah bless you—*follow me as I turn*—until the Seventh Day—*stay not too close*—ah, you are kind—*lose not sight of me*—father of a thousand mercies!"

On the words the mendicant turned and moved slowly off in the crowd. Larry followed, taking care to move carelessly, but keeping the Doukkala beggar in sight from the corner of his eye. He noticed a tiny bit of scarlet flaring on the back of the man's burnouse, as though it had been patched there. Instantly his admiration rose. In a land of dirty brown burnouses, the mendicant had realized that it would be next to impossible to follow any particular one of them through a crowd, and had placed the psuedo patch as an eye-guide that could not be missed. Larry, grateful for the man's thoughtfulness, walked slowly after him.

Now he was in the heart of the crowd, his face serene, but his ears drinking in low mutterings of uncomplimentary natures, spoken for the most part in the Chleuh dialect. An infidel dog in the midst of the Believers! Had it not been for the menacing eye of the fortress in the shadow of the hills, he knew that ere long a curved, thin blade would reach him and another mysterious killing would be charged up to Morocco.

Red Patch suddenly left the crowd and darted down a dark alleyway. Larry, reaching it, paused briefly. Little liking was in him for the looks of the place, but there seemed nothing else for it, so he stepped forward

and was almost instantly swallowed up in intense darkness. Red Patch had vanished. Taking three steps forward, Larry stopped. His foot had touched something; in fact, he had nearly stumbled over it. He stooped, then while his right hand grasped the butt of an automatic, and felt that the thing which he had kicked was a human body! Now, he heard a voice:

"It is I, Abdu Madullah. Do you take my burnouse, continue straight down the alleyway to the first crossway to your left. Go down that to the fifth door on your right and knock thrice, then twice. Hasten!"

Silently Larry took the burnouse and threw it about him.

"My turban," the other whispered. "Set it upon your head, then go."

In exactly one minute Larry, ostensibly as much a Moor as he had previously been an American, left the mendicant and hastened down the alley as best he could, since he could barely see a yard ahead of him. He had progressed, he judged, for three minutes, then he heard a cry behind him, recognizing the voice of the beggar:

"*Ai, ai,* an infidel dog has struck me down and robbed me; *ai, ai,* this way."

Startled, Larry wondered if this were a trap; if he had been lured here for the purpose of murder and robbery. He accelerated his pace until he was running in the darkness, then saw that he had reached the crossway. Rapidly he swung around the corner to his left, watching closely for the doorways as he did so. His heart pounding a little, he stopped before the door of the fifth house on the right-hand side of the alley in the direction he was going. He heard a hue and cry behind him, voices shouting curses and threats; he lifted his hand and knocked thrice, then twice.

Instantly the door swung open and he was grasped and pulled inside, into sheer darkness. Instinctively he ducked his head and his hand dropped to his gun. He heard shouts close by and knew his pursuers had turned the corner. The door closed softly and a hand grasped him gently by the arm.

"Silence," he heard a voice hiss.

The hue and cry swept by the door, making the alleyway ring with the racket and hubbub. As the sounds died out the hand on his arm tugged gently and he was led along a narrow hallway and down a short flight of steps. Through another door he was led, then he saw a dull sliver of light, as though it were shining from beneath still another portal. To this his guide led him. He opened the door and they stepped into a lighted room. Larry turned and looked at his host.

A gaunt, stoop-shouldered man with a patch over one eye and a matted beard stood beside him, his one good eye gleaming in the dull glow of the lamp.

This individual pointed toward a pile of cushions.

"Be seated, *Moulay,*" he said.

"You will tell me where I will find Omar——"

The other's uplifted hand checked him.

"It is wise that names sometimes be left unsaid. I am he you seek. The Doukkala mendicant waited for three successive days. You are late!"

"Now, in Allah's name, how do you know that?" Larry gasped. "As for that, how did you know I would be here at all?"

"Allah's ways are mysterious and wonderful; who am I to say how certain things come to pass?"

"Which is your polite Moroccan way of telling me it's none of my damned business how the word reached you!" Larry snapped.

"As *Moulay* wills," the other answered humbly.

"Well," said Larry, "what now?"

"Is that for me to say?"

Larry gave it up.

"I seek a thing in a temple," he said. "I have promised one whom we both know that I will find both and give the one to you."

"*Moulay* has a token that might in-

dicate he speaks with authority?" The other's voice was studiously without accent, seemingly lifeless, yet the one good eye was a-gleam with interest.

"I have this," said Larry, and turned his hand, palm upward. The other looked at it, bowing humbly.

"It is sufficient. We shall go where we may talk. Come."

Larry followed the one-eyed man down a twisting passageway, then up a flight of stairs into a room that was barren of life or furnishings. Here, the other opened a door and the American felt the fetid breath of the African night fanning his cheeks. As from a distance he could hear the night life of the market.

His guide emerged into another of the apparently numberless alleyways and hurried swiftly off, Larry behind him. For ten minutes they proceeded thus, dodging and twisting down a myriad of byways, until they paused before a low, nondescript building which had no windows. The guide fumbled briefly, then the door opened and Larry was shoved inside. The door closed again and a light flared. Now Larry's guide greeted him cordially, speaking perfect English:

"Mr. Grenfall, welcome to the home of Omar ben Medjad. Permit me to extend my sincere apologies for the sorriness of the outside appearance, but I have reasons for it; also, permit me to say I am sorry I had to receive you as I did, but, my friend, it was necessary. I had intended that you come to the Shop of Gold, but times are parlous at the present and without my shop I would be useless in the work I am doing, hence at the last minute I had to change my plans and receive you otherwise. Now, we can talk, but let it be in English, please. I fear no prying eyes here and no distended ears; still, it is ever the part of wisdom to play safe."

The man now removed the patch from his eye and stood revealed with perfect sight. The patch had been, it was plain, a disguise.

"Be seated, Mr. Grenfall, and be comfortable while I make coffee; also, I must cleanse myself of this disguising filth. When the coffee is ready, I shall rejoin you here. You will, I trust, help yourself to cigarettes." He pushed forward a taboret with a jar of cigarettes on it.

Larry lit one, then threw himself full length on a low divan, waiting. In a half-hour Omar ben Medjad returned, bearing coffee. Larry was startled at the transformation in the man's appearance. His beard no longer was matted, but was combed to a neat point; his skin was several degrees lighter, thanks to having been cleansed of its dirt, and his clothes were those of a man of wealth and station. He set the coffee on a taboret and proceeded to pour it. Then, as Larry sipped at the strong, aromatic decoction, he said:

"When you are quite finished with your coffee, let me have that burnouse and turban. Abdu will be here shortly and I shall return it to him."

"That miserable fool caused an uproar that——"

Omar laughed in his beard.

"It was but a ruse, Mr. Grenfall. You are to disappear this night, my friend, and Abdu and I could think of no better way to put you out of the road than to have you murdered. Therefore, consider yourself dead, this very minute, and your body thrown into the muddy waters of the town canal."

Larry rose, startled.

"What do you mean?" he snapped, and his hand hovered near the butt of his heavy automatic.

Again Omar laughed.

"Simply, my friend, that it is necessary for you to drop from sight without the knowledge of the commandant at the fort. You are here, seeking. Very well; but to seek, you must seek as one of us. To do this you must disappear as an American and never be heard from in Ab Dukkar again. How could you be made to disappear easier, pray tell, than by my little plan?"

"That plan is——?" Larry's voice still was a little thin.

"The plan is that Abdu, the Doukkala mendicant, raised a hue and cry that you had robbed him. A crowd of men were seen to pursue you down a dark alleyway. You were never seen again, but certain blood spots were left at intervals in the alley and the ground has the appearance of having been struggled over. The blood spots and the signs of the struggle will be found tomorrow. Likewise, some of your clothing, which you will give me tonight, will be found near these blood spots in the dirt. The French commandant will write in his big red book the details of another murder at unknown hands, adding that the whereabouts of the body also is unknown. Simple enough, is it not?"

"But, I do not understand, I'm afraid," Larry confessed.

"For one who has written of the intrigues of my country, you are woefully dense this night," Omar rejoined. "I have merely staged a murder, Mr. Grenfall, to throw the military off the scent; also their Partisan soldier-allies. It is necessary that tonight you become a Moor. Inasmuch as the commandant does not know you, did not even see you, he probably will think you were someone who amounted to little or nothing and after a cursory examination he will forget the incident. When you leave here this night, my friend, you will leave as Youssef el-Habbassi, a powerful wizard. After that—Allah alone may say."

"It is a good thing I faked a passport so that when they hunt down my record they'll find it was only a sailor who had shore leave and deserted that was murdered." Larry chuckled, appreciating the situation. Then he added: "When I leave here, I leave to find a Temple and fetch to you—"

"A casket," Omar ben Medjad rejoined gravely, his eyes glittering. "Now, I see you have finished your coffee. To work, please. Lay aside your clothing and don the apparel I have prepared," and he indicated a pile of Moorish clothing nearby.

Larry rose and emptied his pockets, laying twelve small cubes down with extreme caution. Then, removing his American-made apparel, he donned the garb of the Moor. Deftly he wound his turban, so that anyone watching would never have known it was not experienced Berber or Algerian hands that performed the trick.

"Curse it, Omar; it is imperative that I have places to carry some of these things I've brought with me. Great guns, man, I couldn't wizard worth a cent if I lost my paraphernalia."

Omar laughed.

"Search about your new togs; pockets have been prepared especially. You see, I knew you would bring a magician's accouterments, for you were destined from the very start to play the role of a *taleb*, and I made ready for you."

Larry stared at the other in wonder.

"I must say that you are either an infernally good guesser or you have had what we Americans call inside information concerning me."

In a few minutes he had disposed of his things and when he had finished he turned to Omar and, speaking in guttural Chleuh, said:

"Father of jackals, what of my costume? Offspring of the hill wolves, will I pass muster?"

A grim smile crossed Omar's face.

"So much so, *Moulay*, that the Sultan himself would accept you as a true Believer. *Ai*, Mr. Grenfall, you will do; now, from this moment you are Youssef el-Habbassi, wizard. You will find you are already known, for I have taken pains to have word of your coming spread in advance and your reputation has not suffered at my hands. But I hear Abdu knocking. Peace, till he enters."

CHAPTER V

A BLIND TRAIL

LIKE a breath of the mysterious night without, the Doukkala mendicant slipped through the door, salaaming to Omar ben Medjad. He threw a curious

glance toward Larry and raised his eyebrows questioningly, whereat Omar laughed in his beard.

"Ha, my friend; you could wish for no better recommendation for your disguise since Abdu, here, does not recognize you."

The mendicant, grasping the situation, salaamed in turn to Larry, muttering gruffly that Allah alone would have known the *nasrani* in his new attire.

"What success had you, Abdu?" Omar asked and the mendicant, sipping avidly at the black coffee his host had placed for him, told them.

"At an intersection of alleys in the Ber Kedjiz we killed a goat, and made a goodly scatterment of blood about the place. When the Partisan police and soldiers arrived there was naught to be found save signs of a struggle and those bloody splotches. The commanding officer routed from their houses those who live in the neighborhood, among them being this humble follower of Allah. We did report sounds of a struggle in the night, of harsh voices and the frightened wailing of a *nasrani;* we also told of having heard blows struck, then a sound as though a body had been dragged hurriedly away. True enough we must have spoken, for the Partisan Police found signs of the fighting, saw the blood and picked up a mark which seemed to indicate a heavy object had been dragged across the ground. These signs disappeared at the canal and the search ended there. The Partisans could not know that a weighted sack had made the marks, nor that the sack even now lies at the bottom of the muddy waters. *Ai,* it will be an excellent report the commandant will be given on this," and the mendicant chuckled grimly.

"You have done well, Abdu," said Omar, seeing the man had finished his coffee. "You may go."

As silently as he had entered the Doukkala mendicant, after taking his burnouse and certain of Larry's garments, stepped from the room and out into the night.

Alone once more with Omar, Larry looked at the man curiously. "Omar," he said, "I want some information. Tell me, did you know Ben Mansour?"

The other nodded silently.

"You know he is dead?"

"Killed by a subtle poison," Omar agreed.

"Ben got me to promise to come here, Omar, find you and learn the way to the Temple. I promised him I would endeavor to recover a casket and place it in your hands. He hinted vaguely of fearsome things, and there was a messenger——"

Omar interrupted him.

"I know, *Moulay;* a messenger from the Temple, who bade Mansour to a throne or death; the messenger and two companions who accompanied him to your country have returned. They are now in the hills, reporting to the powerful group of marabouts who sent them."

"Confound it, Omar; how do you know so much?"

Omar chuckled grimly.

"I have eyes that see and ears that hear. They keep me informed of all that it is needful for me to know. That is why Ben Mansour told you to come to me."

"Well, I'm here. Now tell me what the grand idea is," Larry said.

For a long time Omar looked at him silently. Finally, he said:

"Ben Mansour was my dearest friend; I would lay down my life to return his and surely, you, also, must have been held dearly in his heart, else he would not have chosen you as the one to perform a great mission. I shall tell you a story, but before I speak I require your pledge that in case you think the risk too great, your courage too frail, or the obstacles too vast for you to overthrow, you will never reveal what you are about to hear."

"I promise, by the spirit of my ancestors and by the tomb of your own prophet, Omar," Larry said solemnly.

"I am satisfied," said Omar, lighting a fresh cigarette. He drew a long

draught, sipped his coffee, then thrust the cup aside.

"For many centuries the Berber tribes, in common with all Moslem, have observed the *mouloud,* which as you know is the anniversary of the birth of the prophet; in your country you have Christmas, which is the same occasion to you. Often, however, in past years when these observances were finished, the hill tribes forgot their late religious fervor and flared up in warfare against one another so violently that in many instances weak tribes were virtually eradicated, while even the strongest had their ranks decimated seriously. This condition obtained until forty years ago, when Sherif Youcoub el-Masmazi conceived the idea of welding into a powerful league certain of the greatest of the tribes. This resulted eventually in the Seven Tribes of the Berbers, whose histories you protrayed so well in one of your books. This did away with warfare, because the Seven Tribes absolutely dominated Morocco south of the Atlas and even the southern stretches beyond the mountains.

"Sherif Youcoub was able to exercise his great power because he possessed the Sacred Eye, which was a symbol of power that was handed down by ruler to ruler through blood descendants. Legend has long since put away fact in connection with the Sacred Eye, until now it is more symbolic of power than ever before. To retain his leadership of the tribes, the *sherif,* on each *mouloud,* was compelled by tribal law to go through the Ordeal, wearing the Eye.

"Now, when Sherif Youcoub died, his son, Omar ben Mansour, being a prince of the blood, became *sherif,* and about this time a powerful group of marabouts began to form throughout the Atlas with the object of overthrowing the power of the *sherif* and taking unto itself the rule over all Moslem outside of the domain under immediate control of the Sultan, the French and the Spaniards. These marabouts became so powerful finally that through intrigue they stole the Sacred Eye and carried it to their inviolate Temple, where no man save the marabouts and the greatest of the wizards may go, because no one else may take the road save only after the marabouts have summoned him. Also, the marabouts stole Ben Mansour's son, and it is said they taught him of their lore at a walled city in the hills, then at a later date lost him. Some say the son is now hiding in the city of Duk el-Abda.

"Following the theft of the Sacred Eye the people on the eve of the next *mouloud,* and inspired no doubt by the Marabout Group of plotters, let it be known in no uncertain tones that unless the Eye were worn during the Ordeal, the *sherif* might take his choice between death by the sword or strangulation. Ben Mansour fled in the night, his son having been stolen and his wife having died some time before. He disguised himself cleverly and reached Fez, where he was fairly safe. It was there you first met him and it was there, my friend, that he took a strong liking to you. For years he traveled, always hiding, then one day a messenger found him and told him that if he would return and lead his people, he would be spared his life and restored to the *sherifcy.*

"Mansour refused, asking that the honor be given his son, then he resumed his flight. Meantime, back in the Atlas, the powerful Marabout Group had announced to the people that it would produce a *sherif* for them. To make good their boast, they decided they would heed Mansour's request and place his son on the tribal throne, which is a figurative throne at best. The Group, however, planned to back the boy just so long as he played the game of the conspirators, but in building up their power and setting their plans these holy men made a fatal error. They told the people they had caused the downfall of Ben Mansour because it had come to their ears that he was dickering to hand the Sacred Eye over to the Spaniards and so make easy the conquest of the southern Atlas. They

told the people that it had been said in the past that so long as the Sacred Eye remained in their possession the Berbers would never be subjugated and thereby implied that if the Spaniards were given the symbol they would conquer the Berbers and bring them under their rule as they have brought the Submissive Tribes of the plains. That legend has been behind the twenty years' warfare of the Riff tribes against Spain, for the Riffs are allied with the Berbers.

"The belief grew among the people that they were free from the menace of conquest only so long as they possessed the Eye. They became fanatics on this subject and now they would make any sacrifice rather than permit the symbol to leave their hands. Now, this is where the Marabout Group left the loophole that may eventually kill it, for the Spaniards, through spies, got wind of the legend and conceived the idea of obtaining the Eye. The Spaniards, knowing full well their sorry conflict with the Riff Tribes for twenty years, decided that diplomacy rather than arms should win for them and planned to get the Eye through theft, if necessary. They have been trying now for years.

"But they have never been successful, nor are they likely to be. The present warfare indicates this clearly. However, the danger has become so plain to the Marabout Group that these consummate villains have secreted the Eye in the Temple of Doom. The next *mouloud* is to see a mighty gathering before the Temple and the *mouloud* has resolved itself into an affair with two great features—the Ordeal and the restoration to power of a *sherif*."

"I have followed you closely, Omar ben Medjad, and I must confess that I am as much in the dark about some things as ever I was. What am I to do, save try and secure the Eye and deliver it to you?"

"My friend, I am not sure that I know even a small part of all that you may be called upon to face. But this much is true: If the Marabout Group loses the Eye, it also loses its power and a *sherif* will go to the throne. Are you beginning to see, Mr. Grenfall, that in your hands lies what appears to be the ultimate fate of certain things that are vital to the Berber Tribes?"

"I am not," said Larry sententiously. "In the first place, Ben Mansour is dead, and if the Eye is lost I understand Mansour's son stands a good chance of becoming *sherif*, with the backing of the Marabout Group, which is well and good. What more is there?"

Omar's head drooped an instant, then he looked up.

"Ben Mansour's son would become *sherif*, as Mansour wished, but when Mansour talked with you he did not know the Marabout Group wanted his son only to save its own face and planned to slit his throat once that was accomplished. But with the boy raised to power and the Eye taken from the Marabout Group, the youth could reign in peace."

"What will occur if this Eye is placed in your hands, Omar, other than what you have hinted?"

"If the Eye reaches me, the line of Omar ben Mansour el-Masmazi will rule the Berbers and the boy will be safe on his figurative throne; the Marabout Group will dissolve and lose power until it becomes again what it used to be—a band of wandering holy men; there will be no more conflict with Spain and peace will reign throughout the Atlas." Omar's voice rang with fervor as he spoke.

"Then, as I understand it, I am to learn in some manner where lies the Temple and I am to enter it by reason of my authority as a wizard and once inside, by hook or by crook, I am to obtain the Sacred Eye and get it to you."

"Precisely, Mr. Grenfall; and I am to restore it to Mansour's son."

Larry rose, drawing his burnouse about him and setting his turban on his head.

"I have pledged my word, Omar ben Medjad, or I would draw out of

the whole mess," he said. "I go, but first—how shall I reach this Temple?"

"That," said Omar ben Medjad, "is something that no man save a marabout or a wizard may tell you. I merely have a suspicion that it lies somewhere south, at the end of the Forbidden Road."

"Great guns, Omar!" exclaimed Larry. "Do you mean that I am to leave here and start on a blind hunt to find a mysterious temple?"

"You are now Youssef el-Habbassi, the Wizard," Omar responded. "You will find your name a by-word throughout the length and breadth of the road you will tread, for I have been painstaking in my efforts to spread your fame. I have even caused it to be hinted that the Marabout Group, with all its power, possesses no whit more of it than you. In your guise, information will be available to you that only the marabouts possess, and certain other wizards. Somehow, somewhere you will find the way, and you will hear of the Mountain of Shadows, the Gate of the Burning and the Gate of the Daggers; likewise, you may meet the Striped Death and you will, if successful, see the Temple and hear the Voice; you will see the Great Eye and know that the Eye of the Prophet on your finger has a meaning; you will see the Swords of the South and you will learn of the Ordeal. But you must be careful, and you may have to use every artifice of your lore to overcome what may seem unsurmountable obstacles—obstacles which will surely crumble if you make no misstep in your conjuring. Mystery is life and death, meat and drink, to the Moor; if you bewilder him, you command him. That is the secret of the Marabout Group's power—that and possession of the Eye. Now, it is nearing dawn; the *fedjr*, the time of prayer at dawn, comes on apace. Leave me, dear friend, and choose your own method of starting on your quest; only, start soon. Know, too, that I, Omar ben Medjad, shall never at any time be far from you, waiting to aid you, or, mayhap, actually assisting you when you least suspect."

"You, too, enter the hills?"

Omar bowed.

"Then," said Larry, "why cannot we travel together?"

"It will not do, my friend, for if I went with you I could not do certain work that awaits my hand; work that will be of material aid toward the success of your own mission. In time, it runs in my thoughts, there will be one who will join you, and if he does, treat him kindly, I ask, in Mansour's name."

Larry turned.

"I go, Omar," he said, "but it's all damned mysterious and I don't like it. Now, farewell." He moved toward the door.

Omar ben Medjad's parting words followed him:

"Heaven be with you, my friend."

A light in the east presaged the coming of dawn when Larry finally reached the market place after considerable delay because of his unfamiliarity with the way. He saw a man of the Chiadmas sitting squat before a stall which had not yet opened. Larry shrank against a shadowed wall and would have turned back into the alley to escape observation until he could better size the fellow up had not the morning prayer saved him the trouble by diverting the other's attention.

Now the east was turning rosy and the fiery ball of the sun was already pushing above the horizon. The voice of the muezzin floated from a minaret calling the Faithful to worship and Larry saw the Chiadma drop to his knees and begin his early devotions. But before kneeling, he cast a keen glance about the market place and apparently had been certain that it was deserted.

The *fedjr* ended and the Chiadma resumed his squat posture, then slowly turned his eyes about him, taking in the scene once more. Beneath a scrawny, bare-limbed fig tree he saw a droop-shouldered man in a burnouse and turban also composing himself as at the end of his prayer.

The Chiadma wondered greatly, so quickly, so silently had he appeared, not ten feet distant.

Now the Chiadma had cause for even greater wonder, for he saw the droop-shouldered one stroke his face and seemingly pluck from his nostrils a vivid, red poppy; then, to cap the climax, the fellow picked up a pinch of dust and cast it to earth, waving his burnouse across it. Magically, another flower sprung up, glowing vibrantly, nodding gently in the soft, fetid zephyrs of the early dawn!

"Ho, wizard," called the Chiadma, "of a surety you have most marvelous powers. Tell me, for a piece of gold, what my future says?"

"What would the Chiadma know of the future that opens only to the gaze of the Compassionate One?"

"It is not of the future, after all, that I worry," answered the other. "I would know, instead, if a foreigner was killed last night, or if he still lives to come this way?"

On hearing this Larry's heart lightened, for he could answer the man in a manner that should prove most convincing. Looking the Chiadma squarely in the eyes, he droned a prayer in a dull monotone, then suddenly pointed to the blank wall of a near-by stall. The Chiadma looked, and as he gazed he saw a film of darkness spread across the wall; saw a white man running down an alleyway pursued by a crowd of burnouse-clad men; saw them catch him and saw long knives flash in the glare of a fitful, mist-swept moon. Furthermore, he saw the man fall and the long knives plunged into him again and again. Then, he saw the body dragged to a nearby canal, whose banks were filled with muddy water. He visioned stones being thrust in the clothes of the dead man, then watched the whole ensemble hurled into the canal.

Quickly the mists cleared from the wall. Larry's fingers snapped in front of the Chiadma's eyes and Larry's voice, speaking guttural Chleuh, was saying:

"And even so the *nasrani* arrived and was set upon. His body now lies at the bottom of the canal. Are you satisfied, Chiadma?"

Awe was in the other's face; his tongue seemingly clove to his mouth. He answered humbly:

"You have answered, O Father of Wisdom, Son of Mysteries; the gold belongs to you, and right willingly do I renounce it. Now, I return whence I came."

"You return to the hills, carrying a message of the death to those who sent you," Larry said gravely, chancing a shot in the dark. "I, too, go into the hills. Let us travel together for such time as may be."

"Now, by Allah's beard, who am I that I should be thus honored?" the other asked. "Who is Abdesselam el-Hadj that a great magician should condescend to travel in his company? I am honored greatly."

"You will be starting at once, Abdesselam?" Larry questioned.

"*Ai*, and that I may say to those who ask me, and pass down to a thousand descendants word of the honor that is done me, whom may I say traveled with me?"

"You will answer them that Youssef el-Habbassi, the Wizard, did take you for company," Larry answered solemnly.

"Yea, I have heard of your coming. Woe is me that I have no fiery stallion of Barbary on which to mount you. *Ai*, woe is me."

"Say not so," Larry said, his voice gentle now. "Lead, Abdesselam; I come at your side."

Silently the Chiadma turned from the market place, where crowds were beginning to gather for a hurried morning's business in order that they might return to the shadows of their homes, out of the heat of the day. Down a winding maze of narrow alleyways the fellow led, then a high wall loomed. A Partisan policeman, long-barreled rifle at attention, stood at the gate. His rifle dropped to a level as they approached and his voice rang in sharp inquiry. To Larry's surprise the Chiadma answered in French:

"For France."

The rifle went up and the tribesman, followed by Grenfall, walked through the gate and down the yellow road that led toward the vastness of the mighty Atlas.

CHAPTER VI

THE FORBIDDEN ROAD

FROM the southern gate of Ab Dukkar the yellow road winds like a giant snake up into the foothills of the great Atlas mountains and six miles from the little walled city loses itself in the vastness of the illimitable range. Along this road Youssef el-Habbassi and Abdesselam el-Hadj made their slow way. It was ten o'clock when they topped the last ridge that was visible from Ab Dukkar and looked back upon the nondescript settlement of the foothills. For three more hours they went on, each succeeding mile burying them deeper in a country primeval. After a time Abdesselam said:

"It is time that we eat," and together they turned from the road and found shelter beneath a giant argan fir.

Silently they began their meager repast.

"How far do you go?" Abdesselam asked, apparently having grown weary of the silence.

"Allah alone knows," Youssef answered. "I have much to do and much to say; it will take time, I fear."

"You will be in Duk el-abda?

"Such are my plans."

"I fear you may never live to reach there!"

Something in Abdesselam's voice caused Larry to gaze at him keenly. The man continued to eat calmly. Larry queried sharply:

"What do you mean by that?"

The other answered:

"Have you a dispensation that permits that you forget the *dohr?*"

Larry was chagrinned. It was, as nearly as could be judged, about 1:30 in the afternoon, which is a time throughout all Islam for a short prayer—the second of the day's program of five. He knelt beside Abdesselam calmly, but was resolved that when the next prayer period came—between 3 and 4 o'clock—he would not be forgetful again.

He glanced keenly at the fellow, seeing that he was busy at his prayers. Something about him suddenly seemed familiar; some intangible manner he had, or some subtle appearance that had all at once made itself visible. After a time a suspicion flared in his mind and gradually grew to a certainty.

The prayer ended and Abdesselam rose, Larry with him. Silently they looked at one another, then Larry decided to risk a chance shot, to verify his suspicions.

"Abdesselam el-Hadj," he said slowly, "I think you should do something about that tiny scar on your neck, else see that your burnouse never slips. I saw the scar just now as you prayed, and only recently the same scar showed while you held converse with a nasrani in a certain house in Ab Dukkar."

"Verily, you are an observant fellow, Grenfall," he chuckled. "I had not thought to test you, nor had it been in my mind to reveal myself. I had only thought to accompany you briefly in order that I might catch you in and caution you against simple and apparently minor errors, for I know that once warned, you will not again forget."

"I confess I was forgetful," Larry answered, "and I am thankful it was you and not the real Abdesselam el-Hadj who caught me."

Omar laughed again, showing white, even teeth.

"Come, we must go on," he said. "I think you will not again forget, for unless I am mistaken you have already impressed upon yourself the fact that soon the *fedjr* will come, that at dusk we have still another prayer, and, a short time later, still another."

"I have impressed myself with those very things," Larry answered grimly. "Also, my friend, I have

been thinking that you are somewhat of a wizard yourself."

"Perhaps, were I to try, I could pass successfully, but my work lies elsewhere. By the way, I want to congratulate you on the entertainment you gave me in the market place. Your powers of hypnotism are marvelous, man, and quite above the general run to be found in Moslem."

"But you weren't easy," Larry admitted. "For a time I thought you were going to be too much for me, but when you looked sharply at the wall I knew I had you. After that, of course, it was only necessary for me to think what you were to see, and to say softly my thoughts. Thus I reproduced in your imagination the scene that I intended to impress on you as a photograph of something that had actually occurred."

"When you succeeded in hypnotizing me, my friend," said Omar, "was in that instant when, realizing your really wonderful powers, and wishing to see what you could do, I consented in my own mind for yours to master mine. As a hypnotist of sorts myself, I know, of course, that the mind which resists cannot be subjugated by another's.

They turned back to the road and resumed their toil upward through the hills. After a time they left the main highway and turned into a lesser thoroughfare, and now they traversed a veritable bower of beauty. Gigantic bushes of Spanish broom, ruddy clusters of pimpernel and snowy white lady's smock hemmed them in on either side, liberally interspersed with deep, golden sprigs of sweet musk balsam, tufted horseshoe vetch and queenly, delicate asphodel. Crane's bill and tiny bird's-eye, blue and pink larkspur and hardy thyme; ox-eye and mignonette, all were mingled here, bathed in the mellow glow of the hot, slanting sun.

"It is a pity that where so much beauty lies intrigue should be so rampant," Larry said, and Abdesselam turned to answer. But before he coud speak a voice reached them, a droning sing-song voice that was suggestive of the minaret muezzin.

"Allah akbar! Allah akbar! God is great, God is great. There is no God but God and Mohammed is his prophet. Come to prayer. *Allah akbar!* There is no God but God."

Startled, they looked about them, then Omar swiftly prostrated himself in the road, Larry following his lead. It was the call to the *aser*, the afternoon prayer.

As the prayer ended Larry gazed about him and saw a small hut, the habitation of a saint, or holy man, almost hidden by towering rocks. Now, watching the door of the squalid domicile, he saw a burly man emerge. Evidently he had been inside to prayer. Larry set him down on the instant as a Berber.

"I," he said, his voice heavy and swaggering, "am Beni Ahmed. Who, in the name of Allah, are you?"

"I am Abdesselam el-Hadj," Omar said, before Larry could speak, "and my companion is the one the mountain tribes have heard was coming—Youssef el-Habbassi, the wizard."

Beni Ahmed's thick lips curled and he jangled his sword.

"A wizard, eh? It is in my mind that it were better to depend on cold steel to carve out the happenings of the future than to depend on a magician to reveal what is in store. How think you, Abdesselam el-Hadj?"

Larry felt Omar's elbow nudge him gently.

"I am not one who may say, Beni Ahmed. Truly, I have seen this wizard do marvelous things. He did read for me an event of the past, which of a surety he could have had no knowledge of, yet did he make it glow as a picture on the face of a burnished lake; and I saw that which I knew to be the truth."

"Then let us test this wizard," said Beni Ahmed. "Read my future for me, Father of Wisdom, and say what you see written there?"

Larry damned his companion sincerely, if silently. This thing of

reading a man's future was something else again.

But there was nothing for it save to play the part Omar had assigned to him, so, boldly, he looked into the face of Beni Ahmed, then, staring solemnly, he centered his eyes on the other's. After a minute of this Beni Ahmed shifted restlessly.

"Well," he roared gruffly, "what halts your tongue? Cannot you see through my thick skull and read what is written there?"

"Nay, Beni Ahmed," Larry answered, forced to speak, his mind racing for an idea, "it is not that I fail to read what is written, but it is not in my heart to tell you what I read."

Despite his bold bearing and his scoffing manner, Beni Ahmed's face was briefly distorted by an uneasy twist of his features. He asked:

"You find that which you do not like. Is that it?"

Larry bowed.

"Then, tell it, that I may know. He who knows what awaits ahead is armed against all evils, is he not? Speak, wizard, and tell me if this you see is anything that my long sword will not carve from my path."

Larry now gazed solemnly at Beni again and spoke in a heavy, sonorous voice:

"I see, Beni Ahmed, that on the third night from this you shall die by a hand unknown to you at this hour. Did I not say I had not the heart to read?"

The other's face paled on the instant, then his bold eyes flared.

"Bah, wizard; you are either a great liar or a bad guesser."

Larry knew he could do nothing less now than carry through to a finish what he had started.

"Nevertheless, it is written, Beni Ahmed."

With never a word the Berber drew his long, curved sword and it flashed about his head, dropping in an arc that reflected the slanting sunbeams and under his heavy, chopping stroke the air seemed to shiver.

"Bah!" said the Berber heavily. "It is in my mind that you are either a fool or a liar. My sword is my protector."

"Nothing under Allah shall avert your fate, Beni Ahmed," Larry said, his voice calm.

They heard the saint whining dolefully and turned to see him rolling his eyes, and praying that the harsh talk before his domicile might be forgiven, since he had had no hand in it.

"Allah avert the evil that will come on my head for this day's sorrow," he said. "Oh, Wizard, why did you read? Sorcerer, begone."

"It was written," Larry said once more, voicing the time-worn platitude of the country. Then he calmly turned his back on the Berber outlaw. The latter at once strode off through the shrubbery and Omar plucked at Larry's arm.

"We must go," he said, "for the hour grows late and we still have far to travel."

They left the saint and took the path already trodden by the Berber. Now they heard hoofbeats thundering along in the distance and caught a glimpse of a snowy stallion carrying the Berber up into the hills.

"You put the fear of Allah into Beni's heart and for three days he will live haunted by his never-ending, ever-growing fears; if in the end he is more convinced than ever that all wizards are fakers, what are the odds? So long as we see him not again, of course," he added, as though through an afterthought.

They had covered probably twenty miles since morning and both were weary, hence it was with no little relief that Larry heard his companion call a halt. But if he thought the journey temporarily ended here, he was doomed to disappointment. Omar turned into a thicket of wild fig trees and emerged soon with two stallions. He brought the animals into the road.

"We have no further fear for the present of spies from Ab Dukkar, my friend, and for the time being we shall ride. I was not sure the ani-

mals would be waiting, but that holy man back there is a good agent. He carried off the part of a saint excellently. At any rate, thank him for those animals."

With the words he swung up onto his mount and started onward. Larry, climbing into his saddle, heartily cursed the short stirrups, than followed his companion. Side by side they thundered onward, and after two hours of this Larry called:

"Omar ben Medjad, if you don't want a dead man on your hands, you had best find a place where we may get some sleep. For one night and two days I have been awake, and today we walked a score or more miles beneath a sun that blistered. I am like to faint of fatigue."

"In an hour, my friend, we halt, and then I shall leave you to finish your journey alone. The holy man found the entrance to the Forbidden Road and I merely go that far, to show you where you will resume your journey tomorrow. When we find the place, my word for it, you shall sleep."

So it was that an hour later Omar drew his horse sharply to the right, around a towering boulder with a cleft top. A single, stunted fig tree grew in the dirt of the cleft. A narrow crevice opened ahead, behind the boulder. Dismounting, Omar led his horse forward, Larry following suit. The crevice twisted and wound through the hill for a distance of five hundred feet, at times closing to such an extent that the horses could hardly get through.

Then they emerged into a thicket of scrub argan fir and leading from this was the dim outline of what seemed to have been an ancient trail. Waving his hand at this, Omar said:

"Now, before you sleep, my friend, I want to tell you that unless my agent is mistaken, there before you lies the beginning of the Forbidden Road. A horse may follow it only as far as Duk el-Abda, after which your journey will be made on foot. This is your road henceforth until you find the Temple. I leave you now, and Allah alone may say when I shall see you again."

Solemnly he raised his hand, then turned through the thicket and galloped off. Larry let him go without protest, then picketed his horse and sought a protected spot among the trees and under the lee of a boulder that still held the heat of the Moroccan sun. An instant later he was asleep.

Down the Forbidden Road two horses sped. One of them carried Omar ben Medjad, his face set in grim lines, racing through the night. The other carried Beni Ahmed, and the Berber outlaw, thundering along as rapidly as his horse could travel, was in a nervous stew. Jagged pinnacles of rock rising about him threw eerie shadows across the way and occasionally a startled lapwing would leave its covert and fly off with a terrific screeching. Beni Ahmed, used as he was to these things, nevertheless started at each shadow and each screech, and cursed savagely. The wizard's prophecy weighed heavily on his mind.

CHAPTER VII.

A CLASH AT DUK EL-ABDA

THE market place at Duk el-Abda, like the bazaars of Calcutta, is a place of indescribable confusion; milling hordes wander constantly, seemingly nowhere in particular, yet never halting. Here the tribesmen meet and mingle; here pungent odors assail the nostrils and tongues join in a babel of dialects. Berber, Chleu, Chiadma, Riata—all meet here.

Flickering lights, placed at widely separated intervals, threw fitful glares over the scene as Larry entered it. Long, eerie shadows stalked from behind the stalls and the high, uneven walls. At irregular points black-mouthed alleyways entered the marketplace and up and down these mysterious, darkened slits among the nondescript houses figures in flowing burnouses flitted.

Brawls were numerous for Chiadma, resenting boastful claims of Chaouya or Riata, his blood heated by a remark dropped, perchance, by a Mouisat, would act quickly and knives would play briefly until friends of one side or the other appeared and the outnumbered men fled down an alleyway, or succumbed to sharp knife thrusts.

Grenfall, his burnouse drawn tightly about him and his turban filthier than ever, reached the market an hour after the *acha*, the time of prayer after dark. For three days he had followed the Forbidden Road and had seen no sign of life. In the gray gloom of the Moroccan twilight he had passed through the north gate of Duk el-Abda and had quartered his horse, knowing he probably would never see the animal again.

He was passing the stall of El-Allal, a seller of fowl, when a hand plucked at his burnouse and he turned to stare into the bold eyes of a wizened Riata.

"*Ai taleb;* I am charged with delivering unto you a message. Shall I speak?"

"Speak," said Larry, watching the other's face.

"He who sent you here says the Forbidden Road stretches south by way of *el-Dholl,* the Mountain of Shadows, and that beyond *el-Dholl* lies much that you seek. You are to hasten, but first you will meet one who will take the road with you."

"Where shall I meet the one who will travel with me, Filthy One?" Larry asked.

"You will learn in good time all that you are to know, *taleb?*" the other said quickly, then dashed off among the milling crowd.

Larry, walking leisurely, followed in the general direction taken by the messenger but did not see him again. The unforgettable odors of the market place tingled in his nostrils and the fetid breath of the mysterious night seemed to close in about him suffocatingly; then he heard a voice calling:

"Youssef; this way and hasten!"

He stood at an intersection of dark, narrow alleys at a point where two came together at the very instant of opening into the market place. The voice came from the shadowed recesses of one of these. Keenly, he glanced down the yawning mouth of the alleyways and was rewarded by seeing a gray blotch of shadow standing beneath a high wall.

Casually Larry drew his burnouse about him and turned into the mouth of the alley. He heard the voice again:

"*Ai,* wizard, the way is devious. Lose me not, else you find yourself with slit eyelids at the dawn in the market place," and the shadowy figure flitted off down the alleyway to the right, Larry clinging at his heels.

Turning and twisting, he brought up blankly in a blind draw in the alleys from which there was no exit save by the way he had entered. His guide had vanished! Larry gazed keenly through the gloom and fastened on a wall that had neither windows nor doors. His back against this, his right hand clasped with grim intent the butt of the heavy automatic he carried beneath his burnouse.

He saw a shadow slip from a door in a house hard by; saw, too, that another shadow was coming from the same house and following the first one. Two of them! Well, so be it. His hand closed decisively over the automatic and he braced himself to receive the shock that was coming. A voice jeered at him from the darkness.

"*Ai,* wizard; it seems that you are about to become a false prophet, even as I stand here to tell you so."

It was the swaggering, heavy voice of Beni Ahmed!

"What mean you, Beni Ahmed?" Larry strove to keep his voice casual.

"I mean it has been decreed that you die tonight, wizard, instead of I, whom you said would die this night from an unknown hand. Now, wizard, it is in my mind that I, too, can read that in the space of fifty heartbeats from now you will be dead. I

think I am a better prophet than you, by Allah's beard, I do."

With the words he threw back the folds of his burnouse and drew a long, curved sword, beautifully mounted with silver and gold. Holding it at guard, he advanced, and Larry lifted his automatic from its holster.

"Prepare for death, wizard, impostor that you are. There are those who know why you come seeking here and their minds will be easier when they know I have finished you."

Now Beni Ahmed advanced to the attack swiftly. Larry realized that if he did not shoot at once it would be too late; yet he hesitated, knowing the shot in all likelihood would bring an alleyful of the Faithful down on him. He lifted his automatic, aiming through the folds of his burnouse, hoping they would muffle the sound of the report. From the corner of his eye he saw the second shadow, which had remained in the background, move swiftly; came a flickering as though of fire in the gloom, a soft, swishing sound ensued, then a *thupp!* With the last Beni Ahmed tossed his arms, his sword clattering at his feet; then he fell in a crumpled heap.

Larry held his fire. The man was dying, else the sounds in his throat lied, and the long, keen-edged blade that stood from between his shoulders was an illusion!

"Ah-h-h, wizard," he heard Beni Ahmed wheeze between gasps, through froth-covered lips, "I was wrong; you are truly a great wizard. I die by an unknown hand, after all. It is as Allah willed and the Group will know I failed."

On the words he was silent. Larry bent over him swiftly and touched his breast in which the heart had already beaten its last tattoo. Straightening, he looked over toward the second shadow.

"May the blessing of Allah descend on you a thousand-fold, stranger. You have saved my life."

The other moved and Larry heard his voice.

"As he said, it was as Allah willed. Had I not heard your name I would not have acted. Come with me. The alley by which you came hither is beset with thieves and those who would kill you for less than the filthy burnouse you wear. I shall show you a better, surer way."

Something in the soft, liquid voice, the bell-like tones, conveyed confidence and Larry, first possessing himself of Beni Ahmed's sword and belt, turned and joined the other.

"This way," the voice sounded and Larry saw the fellow melt literally into the ground beside a low-roofed house.

He looked closely and saw a narrow opening, much after the order of a cellar window, barely level with the surface of the earth without. Unhesitatingly, he dropped and thrust his feet through this opening, allowing his legs to dangle inside. The other's hand touched his leg gently and tugged, whereupon he let go and dropped. His feet struck a paved surface and then, the other's hand now on his arm, he started to follow his guide through gloom that was Stygian.

He heard a door open, heard the soft, liquid voice whisper:

"Bend low; lose not my hand."

He knew he was passing through a low, narrow opening, then, far ahead, he saw a faint sliver of light as though coming from beneath a tightly closed door. His guide led him thither and the door was thrust open, admitting them to a small room; it was covered with thick rugs and heavy, velvety cushions. Small taborets stood everywhere. As the door closed softly behind them Larry turned and looked at his companion.

He saw a slender youth whose complexion was even fairer than his own; whose blue-blue eyes met his candidly; he saw a slim, evenly-featured face with a broad, smooth forehead and eyes set wide.

That the fellow was a Berber he realized instantly, for only among the Berbers whose blood had never been contaminated by the strain of negroid that had swept like a dark

sin through Morocco, was there still to be found this fair-skinned, fair-eyed and fair-haired type.

His eyes, meeting those of the handsome youth, were held by them. Instantly his heart warmed toward the other.

He found himself thinking that the lad was mighty like Ben Mansour and that he was going to love him with the same virile force that he had loved Mansour. He heard the soft voice of the other breaking in on his thoughts:

"You are safe for the present, but your road is long and the dangers are many. From here we go together, you and I. Tell me, shall you be pleased at the companionship?"

Larry reached out with his strong, muscular right hand and dropped it firmly on the slender, well-filled shoulder of the youth.

"You and I are going to be great friends, beardless one; I know it. Tell me your name."

The other hesitated briefly.

"Before I tell you, wizard, have you a token by which I may know you?"

"Now by the Prophet's beard, what matters it?" breathed Larry, but he raised his hand so that the glowing heart of the Eye of the Prophet threw back with a thousand scintillations the flickering lights of the room. At sight of the ring, the youth bowed his head swiftly.

"The Eye of the Prophet," he breathed. "It is even as I was told. Then, you are truly Youssef el-Habbassi, and I am Allal Abdi, only son of the Sherif Omar ben Mansour el-Masmazi, who is either dead or has forgotten me."

"The son of B——" Larry checked himself, lest he say too much. He found himself looking at Allal Abdi curiously, knowing now why he had felt that hot springing into life of sudden affection for the other; knowing now why he had trusted him involuntarily since the moment he had first heard the sounds of his voice.

"You knew my father?" The youth asked.

"I knew Sherif Omar ben Mansour many years ago, Allal Abdi. Tell me, now; know you one Omar——" Before he could finish the other held up his hand.

"Speak not the name, wizard. Even walls, especially Moroccan walls, have ears and sometimes eyes. I know who you mean, for I have talked with him only recently. It was his counsel that set me to spying on Beni Ahmed and following his every move, for the one we both know said Beni Ahmed likely would try for your life and that I was to keep near him and protect you. The man we speak of was here today. At this minute, however, he is somewhere on the Forbidden Road, traveling south, unless he is dead."

"Then, if you saw him and talked with him, perhaps he left a message for me?" Larry's voice was eager.

"He left only this word: 'The Forbidden Road still leads south and somewhere south we shall meet again.'"

"And you go with me, Allal Abdi?"

"I go with you, as one who sits at the feet of wisdom and seeks to learn of the art of wizards. And if dangers should threaten us, wizard, you must use your mystic power to preserve peace for, having been raised quietly and without the opportunities that are given the young of the hills, I am not overly strong."

"Yet, you throw a knife with marvelous dexterity," Larry reminded him.

"That was because I had to throw it, else see you die, and he whom we both know said that on your survival of all dangers lay the success of that which we are fighting to achieve."

"And that," said Larry, "is, in effect, what?"

The boy's eyes widened.

"Verily, you are forgetting that it is I whom you are to help set up as *sherif* over the Seven Tribes of the Berbers, even as my father would

have been had he not been forced to flee, or as I would have been had he died a natural death in his native land and handed down to me his powers."

"I did but speak to test you, beardless one," Larry said. "Full well I know, indeed, that you are the true ruler over the Berbers and that the Marabout Group has it in mind to elevate you only long enough to show the people a sherif, and then——" He paused, having no heart to say the words that had come to his mind.

"Slit my throat in the night, else tie a silken cord about it," the youth finished calmly.

"Your apparel is most filthy for one of your exalted standing. If you are of a mind to change, there are fresh burnouses here that have been prepared especially for your use."

"I shall accept a clean burnouse and fresh turban gladly, Allal Abdi," Larry said, beginning to cast aside the dirty robes he wore. Allal Abdi ran quickly to a nearby door, pausing only long enough to say:

"I shall be back soon, ready to accompany you on the Forbidden Road; array yourself hastily, and I shall prepare coffee."

The youth disappeared and Larry set about donning clean raiment and disposing of his wizard's paraphernalia beneath his fresh burnouse. He found the stubble of a beard was beginning to turn silky on his chin and that as the days passed he was coming more and more to resemble a true Moor.

Allal Abdi reappeared shortly after Larry, freshly clad and feeling clean for the first time in days, had placed his last packet beneath his burnouse. The youth bore coffee, cups and cigarettes. He poured two cups of the black, aromatic beverage and Larry picked up one, sipping it, the while he drew on his cigarette. And he wondered greatly at Allal Abdi, sipping coffee daintily.

For Allal Abdi was the first Berber he had ever known who did not smoke!

CHAPTER VIII

THE MOUNTAIN OF SHADOWS

IF the road from Ab Dukkar had been rough, the way south from Duk el-Abda was almost impassable. Towering mountain peaks stalked high toward the blue-blue skies and the road wound circuitously through these, with many a halt and slant that only an agile man, sure of himself, could conquer. No horse nor other beast of burden could possibly have followed the Forbidden Road after it erupted from the south gate of Duk el-Abda, threaded through a narrow, high-walled pass, then headed on into the eternal mountains.

Larry, following in Allal Abdi's agile footsteps and wondering at the stamina the youth displayed, knew that it was roads such as this that had prevented the encroachment of civilization; he knew, also, that unless some event of which none now living had knowledge came to pass it was probable that the far Berber tribes never would be subjugated, but until the very end would pursue their wild, rugged ways, fighting off attacks of all natures.

They had left Duk el-Abda shortly after the morning prayer and in less than an hour they were walking through a country as primeval, it seemed to Larry, as that which he imagined must have existed in the very beginning of the world. High up, the mountains were barren, but in the gorges through which they made a slow and painful way the foliage was magnificently rich and green, seemingly at least one plant of every genus being in existence there. Nothing could have been more lonely, or wilder, or more beautiful.

At nightfall they paused in a thicket of wild fig trees and prepared to rest. With no little effort Larry finally started a fire going, for he could not, and maintain his role, use matches, for being in effect a wizard, it was not in keeping with his character that he use the habiliments of civilization; but once the blaze was

going the resultant cheer was worth all the energy he had expended. After the meager evening meal he faced Allal Abdi across the tiny fire, kept alive just sufficiently to fend off the droning attack of the insects that came with the darkness.

He found the youth's soft, luminous eyes fixed on his. He heard the liquid tones of the other, speaking with soft cadence:

"Tell me, Youssef el-Habbassi, why you risk your life in these mountain fastnesses on this perilous quest."

"The ways of Allah the Compassionate are inscrutable, beardless one," answered Larry. "It comes to pass sometimes that one does things without any definite reason other than that a friend has spoken, or that one he loves and who loves him has urged."

"And did one who loved you, and whom you loved, urge you to do this, Youssef el-Habbassi?"

Briefly, Larry nodded his head.

"One I loved and who, I think, loved me, urged me to do this thing," he said.

The boy's next question amazed him a little, for with a slow blush that seemed to mount from neck to forehead, he asked:

"And was she you loved and who loved you very beautiful?"

"It was no woman, Allal Abdi, who thus urged me. It was your father."

At this the youth was silent, but where the flush had stained his handsome features there was now a pallor which somehow gave his soft, exquisite face an ethereal look.

"Forgive me, Allal Abdi, for bringing thoughts of your father to your mind. I did not think," Larry said, contritely. The other looked across the fire:

"Did you love my father so much, then?"

"I did; so much that when he asked me to recover the Sacred Eye and place it in the hands of him we both know, I unhesitatingly promised I would try."

"Then," said Allal Abdi, "I know he loved you, for only of those he loved did my father ask favors. I can readily understand, too, why he should love you, but I cannot understand where you saw him; those who know, say my father did not touch foot in Islam during all the ten years of his wandering after he fled from the Marabouts. I was seven then," he added.

"Which makes you seventeen now," Larry caught him up quickly. "You are right as to your father's wanderings. I did not meet him in Islam alone, but in other places. However, I may not say more than that now."

Somewhere off in the blue-black night, heavy with mystery and the scent of the wild lotus trees, a rock moved and, losing its purchase on the ledge where it had been fast, went crashing with a hollow, reverberating roar down into a yawning gorge hard by. Instantly, Larry dropped a heavy foot on the fire, smothering it swiftly.

The sound had menace in it and Larry felt as though an unseen hand had reached out of the nothingness and drawn an icy finger down his spine. He shivered slightly, then grew calm.

Larry let his hand fall to the butt of his heavy automatic and stepped back into the midnight shadows of an argan fir. Both knew that someone was out there in the darkness; both knew that the unknown man of the night might be a Berber bandit, or a spy who had followed them from as far, perhaps, as Duk el-Abda; both knew, too, that lives were held very lightly in this game they were playing more or less blindly.

A soft sound behind the very tree which sheltered him caught Larry's sensitive ears. He saw a blotch merge with the gloom near him and with a single swoop of his powerful arms he drew it to him, clasping it fast the while his right hand crept to a bearded, sinewy throat, ready to throttle. He heard a voice gasping:

"By Allah's beard, you move with the speed of light itself, and with the sureness of a tiger. What hands and arms you have, Youssef el-Habbassi!

Peace be with you and Allah's blessing. Now, loose me."

Startled, Larry dropped his hands and allowed the other to step back.

"Omar ben Medjad," he breathed. "It must be an important urge that brings you to me in such a place and at such a time, Omar," Larry said, grimly. "Come, what is it?"

"Call Allal Abdi, that he also may hear," Omar ben Medjad bade gravely, and when the youth joined them, he said:

"Your departure from Duk el-Abda is known, Allal Abdi, and since you have joined forces with the wizard, the Marabout Group suspects more than ever. It has come to my ears that plans have been laid for the pair of you to die on *el-Dholl*, the Mountain of Shadows. I did not know, when I told you to go with Youssef el-Habbassi, that the Marabouts knew you were actually in Duk el-Abda; I had thought you had outwitted them after you left El-Kaiba. Otherwise, I would have bidden you to remain hidden where you were."

"It is as Allah wills," the youth replied.

"You come to tell us to choose a new road?" Larry asked.

The other shook his head.

"Alas, I cannot, for only by way of *el-Dholl* can you hope to find that which you seek. The valley about *el-Dholl* is guarded heavily, and only the Forbidden Road, which winds across the face of the mountain, is free, and only by going down the Forbidden Road may you find the Temple. I come, instead, to warn you that when you reach *el-Dholl* you will need all your cunning as a wizard, all your strength as a man, to win through; too, I come to tell you that the call for the *Mouloud* is going forth and under its urge, from Algeria to the Sus and from Tangier to the Draa on the Sahara's edge, aye, and in the Sahara itself, all Islam is beginning to seethe and foment. You must not fail now, Youssef el-Habbassi."

"If strength of arm and rugged heart, if cunning brain and alertness of hand will see me through, I shall not fail, Omar ben Medjad," said Larry gravely.

For the first time since he had known the man, Larry saw that Omar was affected visibly.

"Friendship such as yours, Youssef el-Habbassi, is of a kind that no man has the right to expect; it is too wonderful, almost, to be true." He added: "I shall see you either at *el-Dholl* or, failing, I shall see you in the Temple itself, I swear it. Now, I have worked hard, but there is much that I must do yet, and I have a journey to make; therefore, I go. Profit by my own experience of this night and if you walk after dark, take care that you step on no loose stones. Above all, be careful, protect Allal Abdi, and guard yourself when you cross *el-Dholl*."

Mysterious, as ever, Omar ben Medjad turned off into the night.

Larry felt the soft, tugging hands of Allal Abdi on his arm and turned to face the youth.

"*Ai*, wizard, I am fearful for you. Turn back, while there is yet time. You made a promise to my father. Cannot I, his son, absolve you from it? Surely, I may hand back your promise, release you from your word, and leave you without imaginary blot on your honor. Then you can give up this quest and return whence you came."

Larry, seeking to test the mettle of this beardless youth, asked:

"But what of yourself, Allal Abdi? Would that not mean, perhaps, the passing of your chance to win through to your *sherifdom?*"

"What care I for becoming *sherif* of the Seven Tribes? They know me not and I know not them. I know them only as I have been taught to know them, from the things I was told while a student with the Marabout Group. What care I for honor or for riches if one who was my father's dearest friend is to lose his life while venturing in my behalf? Ah, Youssef, I can realize why my father loved you. I, too, have a feeling here," and he touched his breast, then

paused in sudden confusion. Again Larry was astonished at the youth, for that slow blush of his had stained his features once more.

He was touched deeply, and dropped his heavy hand on the youth's turbaned head.

"You and I, O, son of my friend, are going to be famous friends ourselves, it runs in my mind. Would that you were ten years older, or that I were ten years younger. What a friendship we could have."

"And why does our age matter?"

"Only because youth of seventeen is not wont to tie fast to years that have attained to twenty-seven," he answered softly.

"Ah, you are not so wise, after all. What do years matter between true friends? Is it not from the heart and the soul and the mind that friendship springs? And did any heart or soul or mind, loving or sorrowing because of another, ever pause and consider the years that might lie between? You are not old; you are still but a youth, although you are, withal, a brave and learned youth. Come, were you not only my own age when father met and loved you? Is it strange, then, that we two, you and I, should also—" Again the youth paused as a slow blush covered his face, to temples and brow; again Larry was astonished at his manner, which betokened confusion. He said softly:

"You are right, Hardy Flower; years mean nothing to great friendship and it is in my mind and my heart and my soul that I love you very dearly, my friend, and that I want that you should love me."

Allal Abdi dropped his head slowly. His voice, muffled, was as soft as the blue-black night, and as mysterious, when he answered. Larry barely caught the reply:

"I think I do—love you."

The manner in which he said it, or the tone of his voice, Larry did not know which, caused him to look at the youth keenly, but the latter was already preparing his resting place for the night.

All the next day they toiled slowly on their way, ever climbing, ever finding the road more dangerous, the footing more precarious.

Toward evening they came through a narrow fissure in the mountains and strode into a small, level cup in the surrounding ruggedness that Larry instantly seized upon as their camping place for the night. Not more than twenty feet one way by a dozen feet the other, nevertheless it was entirely free from rocks or depressions, and was carpeted with rank, thick grass that promised soft bedding.

As they looked around speculatively, they saw a tall figure emerge from the shadows of a clump of argan fir, a long, shining rifle held before him. His short burnouse and small turban placed him at once as a soldier or a guard.

"I," he announced in guttural Chlueh, "am Hammada ber Hamara, *kaid el-mia.* Who are you and whence came you?"

"O, captain of a hundred," Larry answered, his voice dull, his words falling in a slow monotone, "I am Youssef el-Habbassi, whom men say, is not unknown, even here. This beardless youth beside me is a scholar who studies that he may learn my art. We travel from the north and we go to the south."

The *kaid* shook his head, as though endeavoring to toss sleep from his eyes.

"Well, that is as it may be. It is written that your journey may end here, for those who have heard of your coming and who have set a guard over the pass have judged that you may not cross *el-Dholl* until you can convince me that you are really the true wizard and not an impostor, coming in his name."

"That is well spoken, *kaid,*" Larry answered. "Tell me, what is it that you wish me to do that I may prove to you I am the true wizard?"

The *kaid* slowly lowered his rifle. Again he seemed to be having trouble with his eyes, eyes that Larry had never for an instant left free from his own gaze. He yawned slightly.

"I am bidden to ask that you show me where the Sacred Eye lies hidden, and if you truly are Youssef el-Habbassi, this should be no trouble for you."

For answer Larry pointed toward the dark wall of the surrounding brush. He spoke sharply:

"Look!"

The other stared into the green foliage and as he gazed he saw a shadow pass, then into being there sprang up a great temple, marvelously white and beautiful; minarets gleaming in the late afternoon sun, its gables and carvings standing out in bold relief against the dark-green background of the surrounding valley. Around it ran a low, white wall and men were on the latter.

The vision faded swiftly, and in its stead came a face—the face of Ben Mansour—and the *kaid*, recognizing his *sherif* of a decade ago, shriveled within himself, lifting his hands as though to ward off a blow. Again the vision passed and now across the wall of the brush there came marching columns of soldiers in pale blue uniforms, carrying guns with bayonets attached to their ends; cannon rumbled along behind them and high overhead whirred and hummed ghostly airplanes.

These soldiers were marching across a small valley, surrounded by towering mountains that came down and hemmed them in. Now, out of these mountains came a horde of burnouse-clad figures on swift horses, rifles gleaming in the lowering sun, swords swirling high in the air. The *kaid* seemed to hear the skirl of the Moorish bagpipes; he seemed to hear the call of the trumpet; then he saw the two bodies of men clash in a whirling spray of motion and color.

The vision died swiftly and Larry snapped his fingers sharply beneath the *kaid's* nose. The latter started and looked about him eagerly, grasping his rifle with hot hands. Seeming then to realize where he was, he looked at Larry and there was awe in his voice, fear in his bearing.

"O, wizard; hold it not against this *kaid* that I did only my duty. You are, indeed, the Wizard. Pass on, and carry with you this writing, which was handed me to pass to you in case I was convinced that you are Youssef el-Habbassi. I am told it will safeguard you if you are molested. Tell me, though, before you go, where will the battle I saw be fought?"

Larry permitted an inscrutable smile to cross his face and answered in his most mysterious manner:

"Surely, the *kaid* knows the Pass of Death?"

"And," the *kaid* leaned forward eagerly, "it will come soon; say, for instance, when the *Mouloud* is over?"

Larry nodded.

"And we shall win? Were we not winning when the vision faded?"

Again Larry's smile was as inscrutable as he could make it.

"Only Allah may see the future."

He tucked beneath his burnouse the paper the *kaid* had handed him.

"Go," said the other, and turned on his heel, walking swiftly off.

"Truly, you are a wizard, to make a man so bend to your will. How was it done?"

Allal Abdi had watched with great curiosity. A puzzled look was on the youth's face.

"He saw things, Hardy Flower, that convinced him I am a wizard."

"But nothing appeared, and you talked mysteriously. You described in that dead, dull voice you used a wonderful temple in a beautiful valley; then you pictured in words my father's face and finally you described a battle. In the midst of the last I heard you say distinctly for the *kaid* to wake up. It is most mysterious.

Larry chuckled. Evidently his beardless companion knew nothing of hypnotism or its possibilities. Debating as to whether it would be wisdom to inform the youth, or leave him in doubt, he finally decided to remain silent.

He drew out the paper the *kaid* had handed him. It was written in the Chleuh dialect and signed by the Marabout of Adrar. But its contents

caused Larry to pale swiftly. He read:

"To whoever this order reaches, this is authority to kill the bearer and any companion he may have."

That was all. It seemed simple enough in this land where perhaps only one man in five hundred could read or write; but what if that note had been handed to one of those who could decipher it? It was literally their death warrant.

It told him, too, that this was the Mountain of Shadows and that trouble lay directly ahead; trouble that would require all his cunning and skill to combat. Some sort of a trap had been laid for them. It was up to him to find a means to escape it.

Without explaining to his companion, he suggested that they move onward through the late afternoon and Allal Abdi, with no word of protest, followed. Together they left the little cup. At midnight they paused, high on a mountain, across which their trail was leading.

A brilliant, low-hanging moon lighted the scene about them with a glorious radiance, but the mountains seemed full of yawning chasms with deep, impenetrable shadows, caused by the peculiar formation of the mountain, and it was these shadows that had given the place its name.

Far below them was a valley. At intervals they could discern tiny pin-points of light. Evidently the campfires of the guard that Omar had made reference to; the Marabout Group, it seemed, held the pass through the valley of the Mountain of Shadows.

Recalling the sinister note in his pocket Larry shuddered briefly; not for himself, but for the handsome, slender youth who was with him. Then, they made their camp in the very heart of the blackest shadow they could find.

Before he dropped asleep, Larry called to his companion:

"Truly, you are without fear, Hardy Flower, else you would not make your bed so far from mine."

Hearing no reply, Larry took it for granted that Allal Abdi already was sleeping, and turning on his arm, he, too, dropped into slumber.

CHAPTER IX

BLOOD OF THE BERBERS

IT may have been the soft swish of an osprey out in the gloom, or it may have been the laugh of a mountain jackal; again, it may have been because the shadow in which they had made their camp had shifted so that the deep, golden moon now flooded them in a brilliant glow that caused Larry to waken. Whatever it was, he sat up suddenly, full of a feeling that something was amiss.

His hand touched tentatively the automatic that lay beneath him and reaching out six inches his fingers caressed the long blade he had lifted from Beni Ahmed following the affair in the blind alley in Duk el-Abda. A dozen yards distant he made out a soft ball beneath a wild lotus tree and knew that Allal Abdi still slept soundly. A flicker of light beside the youth told Larry that Allal Abdi had laid his light, Moorish sword close at hand. Doubtlessly, the lad also slept with a hand reposing somewhere near the keen-edged dirk he carried beneath his burnouse.

Down in the valley the pin-points of light still flared, indicating that the guards were alert and watchful. He wished the moon had not shifted, for any movement of theirs might be seen by the watchers below. He rose cautiously to his feet, picking up the long sword and belting it to him. Whether it was near morning or not, he knew that sleep had departed from him for the time being and that to lie and woo it would be a nerve-racking task for which he had no liking. He strode softly nearer Allal Abdi and sat down, the sword across his knees, then composed himself to wait until dawn broke across the mountain or his eyes again would fall heavy with sleep.

He fell to speculating on Allal Ab-

di, this slender, handsome youth, so much like a girl, yet possessing all the qualities of a man: courage, endurance and acquiescence to hardships that must be put up with.

Speculating thus he did not at first hear the soft noise back among the lotus trees; when it sounded a second time, however, he turned his head, instantly alert. He heard it again, a sound as though dead leaves and tiny twigs were being crushed under heavy feet.

Presently he saw a shadow and as he watched it took shape—became a huge, broad figure walking forward softly, naked blade beginning to gleam where it protruded from the shadows into the moonlight. Larry felt his right hand curling around his automatic, which he loosened for easy drawing. The figure came on, then paused in the ring of moonlight and gazed about. Larry could see the fellow's eyes searching, then the man's face pointed directly toward him.

Larry watched the other turn and motion with his free hand, then another figure emerged from the gloom.

The pair now advanced stealthily, swords poised, across the patch of moonlight, headed straight for Larry and his sleeping companion. Larry shifted his heavy automatic and spoke:

"In Allah's name, why come you so quietly here, and why at this hour?"

Startled, the others paused, then at a word from the leader they advanced swiftly, blades going up and making flaming arcs of fire in the beams of the glorious moon. Without doubt an attack was imminent and Larry meditated rapidly on what he should do.

To use his automatic would undoubtedly betray their position to any watchers below; in all probability would summon assistance to this murderous pair just as surely as if they were to lift their voices and call. He resolved on the instant to meet steel with steel, knowing that few in all the land of the Moors could match his skill at sword-play; for he had been taught the use of the swinging blade by some of the greatest masters of France and Spain—taught during those reckless years of earlier youth when adventure had called him always, and he had always responded.

Now, with Beni Ahmed's splendid long sliver of steel in his hand, he rose swiftly, and, rising, he kicked Allal Abdi gently with his foot. The youth awoke on the instant, uncurled, and reached his feet, his slender sword gleaming beside the blade Larry was lifting to a position of guard. Larry maneuvered until he faced the larger of the two attackers, although he knew this might not mean anything, for it was possible that the smaller man was the better swordsman. But of that, he would, of course, know later.

In another instant the four blades clashed and the heavy breathing of their opponents told Larry that here was a pair bent on slaying them with silent swiftness.

Larry felt little fear for himself. The brilliant moon afforded enough light to make trick sword-play distinguishable, and he felt that he could hold his own at this sort of game with the best that Morocco could produce; aye, that he could more than hold his own. As he felt the strength of the other's wrist and tested the suppleness of his arm, his thoughts were all of Allal Abdi, wondering whether that slim youth could possibly stand up under the savage attack his opponent was launching on him.

The ring of metal against metal sounded musically in the moonlight, and rapidly shifting feet quickly beat down the tall grass that carpeted the earth. Larry, taking the beat of a full stroke fairly on his blade, sighed with relief, for he had taken the best the other could give, and Beni's sword had stood up under the test without doing other than bend, as a truly good sword does under such circumstances. Now, shifting from guard to attack, Larry went into action in earnest and his long, gleaming blade fairly slithered through the slanting rays of the moon. Round

and round he drove his opponent, giving him no breathing space, launching attack after attack that soon had the fellow grunting and his breath coming in whistling gasps.

"By Allah," he heard the other breathe, "it is true, then, that you are the wizard. I suspected as much, but there was one who said otherwise; who said you were an impostor. Man nor devil could stand before such infernal sword-play. But as to that, it is as Allah wills."

Larry's sword continued to make flaming arcs before the other, and now he was getting past the fellow's guard, reaching in and pinking him easily with quick, biting touches of the needle-like point that caused the Berber's blood to well slowly in little blotches through his burnouse. He knew that he could give a finishing stroke at any time now, and the other seemed to realize this, also, for he fought with a grim determination to survive as long as possible, then accept the inevitable stroke of death in silence.

Came a swift rush on Larry's part, then he dropped swiftly to one knee, his head swinging sidewise the while his sword went straight out and up. It was a stroke the greatest fencer in all Spain had taught him, one which could not be guarded against save by swift and certain retreat. It caught the Berber flat-footed, sword raised, guard entirely gone. Larry's sword thrust once, swiftly, then he regained his feet, casting never a glance at his late opponent, knowing that it was unnecessary.

Now he turned his attention to his companion's plight and found it to be a plight indeed. Evidently the strength of the attacker's arm had proved too much for Allal Abdi, for even as Larry advanced to his aid he saw the youth go down under a double blow, one that was first a flicking stab at the left shoulder, then a round, sound blow with the flat of the sword alongside the head. It was as though the attacker had meant simply to put the youth out of the fighting rather than to kill him.

Larry attacked swiftly and savagely and the other, with a hearty Berber curse, turned to meet him, growling in his beard at the stupidity and dull sword-play of the man who had not been able to take care of this impostor *taleb*, as he had been expected to do. But his swift, growling talk did not disturb the cunning with which he used his sword, and Larry soon found the fellow immeasurably superior to the man he had just subdued. Still, accepting a full thrust on his own blade, and tensely feeling out the other's wrist, he decided instantly that while here was, in truth, a superior swordsman, yet he was one he need not greatly fear.

As the blades played in the pale light, flashing like lightning, he advanced or retreated, as occasion demanded, and he found his thoughts racing along with Allal Abdi as their central theme. He wondered how badly the youth were hurt and if, after he had disposed of this fellow, the lad would be able to travel for the time being.

His thoughts were interrupted suddenly by a swift, cat-like rush from his antagonist and he saw the other sinking rapidly, to start the very stroke with which he himself had finished the man's companion. With a tiger-like leap Larry went backward, landing on the balls of his feet, watching as the other's head went sidewise and his sword came out and up. It missed Larry by a scant inch or two, and his skin seemed to shrink about his abdomen over the place where the sword would have entered had he not seen the stroke coming, and leaped out of reach.

The other cursed savagely and started to rise to renew the attack, but whereas he knew this superlative trick of sword-play, and knew it well, he evidently did not know that the aftermath, if one is unsuccessful in delivering the stroke, is fatal. He was rising, awkward and unguarded and Larry's second leap carried him forward, in close, and his sword fell in a gleaming flashing arc, its keen edge slithering fairly across the side

of the man's neck. The almost decapitated body crumpled swiftly and sprawled in the beaten grass.

Breathing rapidly, but with full, even measures of air, Larry turned and swept the moon-lit circle with a quick, piercing glance; but no other attackers seemed near; the place was as silent as a marabout's tomb. Evidently these two had been relied upon to finish the wizard and his student companion.

Larry dropped swiftly beside Allal Abdi, laying his sword beside him on the grass. The youth was unconscious, his slim, beautiful face pallid and wan. With a quick motion Larry threw back the youth's burnouse, so that he could get at the wound in his left shoulder, and when he had stripped the protecting folds of cloth away from the firm, well-rounded breast of his companion he dropped it quickly back across the gleaming, blood-stained skin, and a startled exclamation escaped his lips.

For Allal Abdi was a girl!

Dumbly he allowed this fact to sink into his racing, nerve-racked brain. Now was explained that slender, effeminate figure; that beautiful, girlish face; that graceful, ethereal charm that surrounded the other. Now, too, was explained that intangible feeling that had always swept his whole being whenever his companion's eyes had met his own fairly. And, he knew, there was now explained also the reason for that overwhelming, all-pervading love he had felt for the beardless boy.

He had thought it a love comparable only to that which he had felt for Allal Abdi's father, but knew now that it was different, that it was more profound and of a greater quality. Quick to analyze his own feelings under all circumstances, he admitted quite frankly to himself that his whole being, his whole spirit had succumbed to the charm of this dainty figure that lay prone and helpless before him on the grass; without quibbling or arguing the reason, he admitted that he loved this girl, this slender, romantic figure in a man's burnouse, who had been his companion of days only, but who seemed to have been his companion always. Now he knew why, when he had changed his apparel back in that little, hidden room in Duk el-Abda, this youth had fled, not to return until he was again fully clothed; too, he now knew why, at night, Allal Abdi had invariably chosen a sleeping spot considerably removed from his own. Other little oddities that he had noticed in his companion also were understandable now.

Through his racing brain another scene swept; last night when, facing each other across the fire, he and Allal had been discussing their friendship and their love, and seared in his thought indelibly was that last, soft expression of the girl's:

"I think I do—love you."

He groaned suddenly in agony of spirit. This child, this slim, beautiful girl, might be dead. On the thought he bent swiftly and once more drew back the burnouse, exposing the full, firmly moulded breast, across which a jagged, livid gash, not deep, but painful and ugly looking, had been seared by the sword thrust.

From beneath his own burnouse he drew a compact medicine kit, a flat, long kit that held all he thought he might have need of before he came to Islam. In it was iodine, cotton, stimulants. With the iodine, he asceptic ized the girl's wound; with the cotton he dried it, then with adhesive tape he strapped across the gash a soft pad of the cotton, making sure it would last until such time as it would be convenient to apply a new dressing.

This done he drew the burnouse back across the gleaming chest, then turned his attention to summoning the girl back to life. Looking at her face he saw that her eyes were already open and fixed on him; saw, too, that a vivid blush had stained her face from chin to temple. Frankly she met his eyes and there was that in their depths which caused his heart to pound with a rushing surge of energy that was out of all reason.

"You are better, Allal? Are you in much pain?"

She did not answer his question. Rather, with her bell-like voice soft, she sounded a query of her own:

"You know?"

"That you are a woman, Allal?" He dropped his head swiftly, hiding his eyes and the light he knew must have sprung to life in them. "Yes, child, I know."

"And you are not angry with me? You will not foresake your mission because of it?"

He considered swiftly; it added to the weight of his responsibility that here was no youth, but a dainty girl; it made the outlook more forbidding, success less probable, but what could be more wonderful than, with this slim, ethereal being at his side to inspire him, to win through despite all obstacles that Islam might throw before him, to the goal that lay ahead! To battle onward, to invade the sanctity of the Temple, to retrieve the Sacred Eye and set this girl at the head of the Seven Tribes of the Berbers!

"I am not angry with you, Little White Flower; I shall not turn back," he said, softly. "Together we shall go on to the end, you and I, and if the end is sweet, it will be because I have striven to make it so. If the end is darkness and the dregs bitter, then—it is as Allah wills."

She raised a slender, bronzed hand and dropped it gently on his.

"Truly, it is not hard to understand why my father loved you."

"And you?" he asked, unsteadily, gazing hungrily into her luminous eyes, liquid pools of purple delight in the slanting moon rays.

She flushed vividly and looked away, but her voice sounded bravely.

"And did I not answer for you once a similar question?"

With a little, low cry he swept her tenderly into his arms, careful lest he hurt her shoulder.

With a soft sigh she yielded to his eager arms and sank against him, nor did she turn her face away when his swept down, seeking. The contact of her lips, soft, dewy curves of pure rapture, was stifling in its intensity.

After a long moment he lifted his head, gazing into her eyes, star-like now because the shadow of their camp had begun to creep back again.

"Are you sorry I did that, Little White Flower?" he asked, a little huskily, swayed by his great emotion.

For answer her slender arms, bare where the burnouse fell away from him, crept up and encircled his neck.

"I am glad, for had you not kissed me I fear I would never have known that you love, not Allal Abdi, the beardless youth of your adventures, but Benna Selahm Allalabdi, who replaces him."

"And Ben Mansour? He was—?"

"My father; yes," she made reply. "There is a Berber law that no woman may rule any tribe. When I was born, my mother, knowing the birth of a girl would grievously wound father, whose heart had been set on a boy, never told him the difference. Father always believed me a boy and mother, to keep up the deception, separated my name, retaining only for herself my girl's name. Is it clear?"

Larry held her close and dropped his cool palm across her forehead. There was no fever apparent and her eyes were as clear as a mountain tarn.

"It is clear, Little White Flower. But, when we are alone, you and I, call me not a wizard, for at best, as you must know, I am but an impostor."

"Of a truth I have known it for some time," she answered, stroking his cheek with her soft palm. "The wizards are more strict in demanding the homage due to their calling, while you have not been incensed when others have ignored you or plotted against you. Tell me, then, what shall I call you?"

"To you alone, in all the hills, Benna Selahm, Little White Flower, I want to be—Larry."

She repeated the name softly, getting her tongue familiar with it; then, having mastered it, her arms tightened a little about his neck, her lips coming up to his:

"I love you, Larry," she said, and a little song sprang to life in his heart.

There was no subterfuge about her; only utter frankness and the light of a great truth. She was of the blood of the Berbers, and without the artifices to be found in her sex of the super-civilized countries. To her, it was a great honor to tell this man that she loved him; a greater one, to know that he loved her. Her Berber blood bade her away with false utterance and when she had yielded her lips to his it was the Berber blood's way of promising him all that he desired. She was his as completely as though she had been a slave from the African plains, and he a *sherif* of the blood. She knew it and he knew it—and his heart was a happy place where song and joy were mingled.

Tenderly he rose, lifting her. She was as light as the wisp of a golden dream, and his arms, made thrice powerful by his love, felt her weight not at all. He carried her into the deeper shadows and made a resting place for her, then returned and picked up their swords.

At the body of the fallen Berber whose sword had wounded Benna he paused and drew from its place beneath his burnouse the death warrant signed by the Marabout of Adrar. This, he fastened with a thorn from a nearby bush, to the Berber's flowing burnouse, then he rejoined Benna in the gloom.

"I have taken steps to lead certain men to believe, when they find these bodies, that they belong to you and me, Little White Flower. From now on, we travel not as wizard and assistant, but as two of the army of the marabouts. Later, I have a thought, we shall revert to our present roles, but until we cross *el-Dholl* I have a feeling that it is best to forget our old parts and act well the new ones. Praise Allah, I have a strong arm and somewhat of cunning with the sword. I shall pass, I have no doubt; but you, light of my heart —I fear you are overly slender to be a soldier."

"Then, Larry, travel as a *Khalifa*, and take me as your slave. In that manner we shall pass," she suggested.

"Truly, you have wit. That, indeed, should solve the problem, although it will ill-become one so fair as you to play the part of a slave. The lowlanders are kinder to their slaves than the hill Berbers, so mayhap that will explain why you carry not the scars of a thousand lash-marks across your face."

"And mayhap my wound can be seized upon," she answered. "I became sullen and disobedient, and you chastised me, as was proper and also your right."

His face lighted.

"Excellent, Little White Flower. But I do not want to travel until you again have your strength."

"My wound does not even throb, thanks to your skill, and my head has cleared completely. I can go on whensoever you choose to lead."

"Then, when the dawn comes, we shall go, Benna, my heart's heart," he said tenderly, dropping beside her and drawing her head to his shoulder.

And after a time she slept again, seeing which he lowered her gently to the grass, then picked up her sword, taking great care to fix it beneath his burnouse in such a way that its presence would not be suspected. It would never do for Benna to pose as a slave, yet carry a sword, unless she were bearing her master's arms for him.

With the dawn they made certain necessary changes in her apparel that would permit her to pass as his slave, then they left the scene of their night's adventures. They still headed south.

CHAPTER X.

THE SHOP OF BOU HAMARA

FROM the mountain the road led downward, toward a *karia,* or unfortified village ruled over by a kaid. Larry, swaggering along with the gait of a *khalifa,* for he was playing the part of a lieutenant, and followed closely by Benna, who now had no identity but walked with sullen, downcast mein and with dull eyes, allowed Beni Ahmed's long sword to jangle carelessly at his side. Despite his seemingly reckless stride a careful observer would have seen that he made progress slowly. He was not forgetful of Benna's hurts and he was resolved to make the pace as easy as possible.

He attracted little attention, for once down among the scattered tribal camps in the valley he was accepted as one of their kind by the soldiers, and was passed as such. An occasional ribald shout was hurled toward his slave, but the latter neither looked nor appeared to hear, walking behind Larry with a calm sedateness.

In the village he found the usual milling hordes gathered about the central portion—a fetid, stinking market place. Carefully he walked through the crowds, his slave immediately at his heels and if, at times, he appeared to jostle unnecessarily those he passed, only himself and the girl behind him knew it was because he was fending off reckless passers-by who otherwise would have jostled Benna. And on such occasions, if a bearded lip curled or an angry voice muttered threateningly, why, Larry's bronzed, muscular right hand fell swiftly to the hilt of his sword and he swore boisterously by the Breath of Allah that if anyone wanted a fight, he would be accommodated.

The breadth of his shoulders and the span of distance from his toes to his low turban effectually stifled any over-confidence would-be opponents might have felt, and save for verbal clashes that waxed heated and sometimes prolonged, he made the traverse of the market place without serious incident.

In the shadow of a low, squat fig tree he paused as the voice of the muezzin sounding from a minaret called the Faithful to prayer.

"*Allah akbar! Allah akbar!* Come to prayer. There is no God but God and Mohammed is his prophet."

He knelt at prayer, conscious that another knelt close beside; conscious, too, that it was not Benna. Out of the corner of his eye, which he unclosed for the purpose, thereby taking a risk greater than any unfamiliar with the tenets of Islam may know, he saw a dirty figure almost touching him; heard the fellow mumbling low words, over and over, words that, beating dimly into his senses, he finally realized were meant for him.

"Come to the shop of Bou Hamara, Bou Hamara; come to the shop of Bou Hamara, at the end of the Street of Figs."

"Why should I come to Bou Hamara, why should I come, why should I come?" in a low, singsong voice, Larry questioned.

"Allah alone may say the reason, say the reason, say the reason," droned the other voice. "I but come to give you the message, give you the message, give you the message."

Larry, fighting the temptation to burst into laughter at this comic opera performance between himself and the unknown, replied:

"You lead the way and soon I shall follow, soon I shall follow, soon I shall follow," and was aware that the other was now intoning the true Islamic prayer, whereupon he promptly followed suit, for he had detected a movement from another praying man not far distant; it was only that the fellow had turned his head a trifle, but to Larry and his late conversationalist there was that in the movement that suggested the fellow had cocked his ear, that he might better hear what manner of strange prayer appeared to be underway across from him.

The prayer ended, Larry rose and gazed keenly at the messenger. He

saw a tall, slim figure with a matted, greasy beard and sullen face, darker than was usually the case among the hill Berbers and he set the man down as a Riata or a Chiadma. His significant glance was not lost on the other, for that one now turned and shuffled off across the market place. Out of the corner of his eye Larry saw that Benna had once more fallen behind him and with his sword clanking he stalked swaggeringly off in the direction the messenger had taken.

At an opening in the market place, where a narrow, twisting thoroughfare led off to God knew where, his guide turned and Larry, following, found himself walking beneath squat, thick-leaved fig trees. Evidently this was the Street of the Figs, and they were bound for the shop of Bou Hamara.

After a time the end of the street was in sight and the guide paused before a low structure with a wide opening in the front; it appeared to be a nondescript shop, much after the order of thousands that are to be found throughout the whole of Morocco. His guide turned in here and Larry, finding the door remained open, followed, with Benna close at his heels.

The messenger now lifted a finger to his lips and peered carefully from the wide space, gazing thoughtfully up and down the street. There were no more structures to their left, down the roadway, but the wall of the semi-jungle closed in here and would have made a superlative hiding place for any spy who might have been posted to watch their actions.

Kicking aside a thick rug and arranging it peculiarly, the guide now lifted a trap in the floor and indicated with his hands that Larry and Benna were to descend. Larry, gazing into the gloom below, hid a smile and waved his hand for the other to precede him, saying:

"I shall close the trap; likewise, my slave will see that the rear is well guarded."

The other regarded him keenly, but briefly, and said:

"Bou Hamara stabs no man in the back. I go; follow closely and bring the slave with you. Close the trap carefully and the rug will fall into place across it," and with the words the fellow dropped through the opening. Larry saw a light glow below, as though a lamp, its wick low, had suddenly flared brightly. Then, holding his sword carefully so that it might not catch, Larry stepped through the trap and onto a ladder below. Behind him Benna followed and carefully lowered the door, drawing it firmly into place.

Bou Hamara was standing below and, turning, he led the way through another opening and down a low, narrow passage.

For a short time they followed this narrow passageway then another door opened and they stepped into a room luxuriously appointed with Oriental furnishings. Bou Hamara indicated piles of cushions and Larry dropped onto some promptly. As Benna remained standing, carrying out her part, Bou Hamara chuckled grimly, and said:

"It is not necessary to dissemble here, Allal Abdi. Be seated," and with the words he sat, cross-legged, on other cushions. Surprised, Benna glanced at Larry and he nodded, whereupon, grateful for the opportunity, she sank onto a thick pile of the silken pellets and stretched her weary legs, conscious that she was greatly fatigued and that the wound in her breast throbbed a little. Bou Hamara was the first to speak:

"I had been expecting you, but when word reached the *kaid* at dawn that you had been killed in the night I had given you up. It seems that two bodies were found up *el-Dholl*, which carried a message signed by the Marabout of Adrar, whose hut is not far from this village. Since it was known that the note had been handed to you later yesterday, it was taken for granted that the bodies were yours. I doubt not that the Marabout of Adrar will be put out to learn that a mistake was made."

Larry was conscious of a grim humor behind the words.

"Did you see the paper found with the bodies?" he asked.

"I did," the other answered, and he chuckled low in his beard.

"Who told you we were coming?"

"Suffice that I expected you and that something told me the dead were not yourself and Allal Abdi. But Allal Abdi seems faint. Is he ill?"

"Listen a moment, Bou Hamara. Who are you and why did you summon us here? Give me some word or token that I may know you are one to be trusted. Otherwise, by Allah's beard, I will leave and it will go hard with you if you attempt to stop me."

Again the other's low chuckle sounded and his beard wagged like the plumes of the argan fir in a sandstorm.

"You are cautious, my friend; but that is right and proper. One whom you know as Omar ben Medjad arrived here not many hours since. I had some talk with him. Need I say more?"

Eagerly Larry leaned forward.

"Then, truly, we are in the hands of friends, and I thank Allah that it is so. Allal Abdi, whom you recognized despite his guise of a slave, was hurt sorely in last night's affair on *el-Dholl*. He received a sword cut on the breast and needs rest. I have treated his wound and it will heal rapidly with proper care, but the healing is apt to be stayed unless he may have quiet and remain away from the bitter heat of the outside. Tell me, Bou Hamara, how long, in safety, may we rest here?"

Bou Hamara appeared to consider.

"Three days, *taleb*, or, I should say *khalifa*, since you obviously have changed your guise. In three days, or less, I depart and after that you must be on your way. Besides, the *Mouloud* draws nearer and there is an increasing restlessness among the people who are awaiting the restoration to power of a true *sherif* to lead them."

"In three days, Bou Hamara, with the nursing that I shall give him, Allal Abdi will be able to travel with the best of us. It is in my mind," he added, thoughtfully, "that when I go, it shall be once more as a wizard."

"Something I was about to suggest," Bou Hamara answered. "Now, I go to prepare food and coffee; and I will fetch cigarets. Meantime, do you be looking to the wound of Allal Abdi."

Larry found Benna's eyes upon him and he crossed to where she lay at ease on the cushions.

"I think, light of my life, that what Bou Hamara said contains much wisdom." He drew forth the little medicine kit as he spoke.

Quietly, she lay watching his face as he ministered to her; making no protest at the sting of the light applications of iodine. He was gratified to find it healing nicely, having dried and clotted. After all, it was a skin wound, not deep, and would not leave much of a scar. But as to the latter he knew her simple Berber mind would not for an instant think; there was no vanity in her and she could not conceive that a scar could in any way mar her attractions in the eyes of the man she loved.

Tenderly, as he finished attaching the last piece of tape, he lowered his head and touched his lips to the gleaming skin, near the wound, then dropped to meet the upsweep of her arms, to meet the hot, vivid contact of her soft, scarlet lips.

A noise in the passageway aroused them and he straightened swiftly, drawing back into place the protecting folds of the girl's burnouse, and shifting the cushions beneath her head that they might be more comfortable for her. Then, he turned to find Bou Hamara's eyes on him, but there was no suspicion in their depths, only solicitude.

"The wound," he said. "It is better?"

"Healing nicely," Larry answered, aware that the flood of crimson was ebbing from Benna's face, that her eyes were soft and star-like and dreamy. "The three days you have

promised us will see Allal Abdi ready to travel again."

"It is well," said the other, and he placed the food. "As I told you, there is little enough time to spare. If you fulfill all that is expected of you, you will do well to be ready for the action that will come with the anniversary of the prophet's birth."

"You spoke of the people growing restless. Tell me, has Omar ben Medjad heard of this restlessness?" questioned Larry.

"I think he has, for all Islam is rapidly becoming aware of it. Even the Spanish in far-off Ab Dukkar must, by now, have heard a breath of what it means."

"It is, then——?" breathed Larry, leaning forward and forgetting his meal.

"It is a plan conjured by the Marabout Group for the Seven Tribes of the Berbers and their allies to the south, east and west to unite in a concerted movement against the power of Spain in Morocco; a move for the tribes to sweep out of the hills like a blight and scatter the Spaniards and the Partisans and the Submissive Tribes and the *nasrani* to the four winds. If successful, it will be the greatest massacre Morocco has ever known. The move is inspired, no doubt, by reason of the successful warfare of the Riff tribes against the Spaniards."

"Bou Hamara, I have suspected this for a long time, but only now have I heard said that which was in my thoughts. Tell me this: If I recover the Sacred Eye and place it in the hands of Omar ben Medjad, how will it stave off this terrible thing?"

Bou Hamara considered a moment, fingering his coffee cup and drawing deeply on his cigaret.

"I thought you realized, Youssef el-Habbassi, that Omar ben Medjad is fighting as much for Spain as he is to set Allal Abdi in power. The Eye in his possession, it is in his mind to place the youth on the tribal throne and himself holding the Eye, guarded and secreted, give his own guarantee for the safety of Allal once the latter is *sherif*. With Allal ruling, friendship with Spain, and France, too, would be reaffirmed, conflict would cease and the mountain passes would no longer run red with the blood of brave men. An era of peace and good will would sweep the Berber country and the Marabout Group, of a necessity, would be dissolved and its members become what they used to be, wandering holy men, ministering to the religious wants of all the people."

"Having told me so much, Bou Hamara, tell me, too, where I shall find the Temple of Doom, and how I shall enter it after I have found it?" He looked at Bou Hamara expectantly, but the shopkeeper shook his head.

"Am I Allah, that I know all things?" he asked. "You must continue south, along the Forbidden Road."

"Tell me, do you know where Omar ben Medjad is now?"

The other drooped his head.

"He is somewhere along the road, mayhap ahead of you, making ready the way as best he may for your coming, wizard."

"He left no word for me?"

"Word of a sort," answered the shopkeeper. "He said there would be one at the Gate of the Burning who would be watching for you, seeking to aid you. Too, he said that you would see the Eye, but were not to fear it; that if you heard the Voice, you were to use your wit, and that if called on to meet the Ordeal, you were to meet it as occasion told you was best. He said you probably would pass through the Gate of the Daggers and that you should pass through fearlessly. Now, I must leave you. If, at the end of three days, you have not seen me again, go quietly through a passageway I shall show you. It will bring you to the jungle, and from there you must push on, straight south. Take what food you may desire from the stores you will find here."

He rose, and Larry followed him down another twisting passage which brought them to light out in the semi-

jungle and once here Bou Hamara pointed off toward the south.

"In three days, your road lies there," he said, and turned back into the passageway, whose mouth was hidden by a thick wall of vines and flowers.

They found Benna sleeping calmly on the cushions and Bou Hamara disappeared in the direction of the shop.

Left to himself, Larry meditated. It was evident that the Marabout Group of the mountains was fomenting a fresh wave of warfare against Spain, and perhaps France, and it was history that the people believed they would win so long as they held in their possession the Sacred Eye.

Without a doubt, if the Marabouts were to lose the Eye and its fabled powers were to be placed at the disposal of Spain, warfare would cease for all time in these hills and civilization's far-flung borders could be extended yet another way.

With Benna on the tribal throne as *sherif* of the Seven Tribes, Spain nor France would have aught to fear from her, for she would rule wisely and well.

He found himself wondering, however, what would become of him in this event, and suddenly, in a blinding flash of realization, it came to him that to place Benna on the tribal throne meant for him to renounce her!

It came to him in that hour that Benna, being a woman, could not by Berber law rule the tribes, and that if she were to ascend the throne as a man, then she was forever lost to him!

It came to him then that he knew which way his decision would be made, for Omar ben Medjad, Spain, France and Benna herself, all were set on her ascension to power. Obviously, then, it was his part to make the great sacrifice—to forswear his overwhelming love and grind out his very heart's blood beneath his heel.

After a time he resolved that no action of his, no ambition that he might have, should stand between Benna and her tribal heritage.

He looked at the sleeping girl, her fair, lovely face a mask of calm repose, her full, shapely lips parted ever so slightly. He wondered if she were dreaming of him, and almost as an answer to his unspoken thoughts he saw a smile start across her face and heard her whisper a low, soft "Larry."

He fought the overwhelming urge that bade him go to Benna, lift her in his arms and devour her with kisses; stifled the love that bade him rouse her and tell her of the thoughts that seared him.

But in the end he conquered himself, and lay quiet.

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE GATE OF THE BURNING

FOR three days they had been journeying through the mountains, Larry once more a wizard, Benna again a student who was learning the art and becoming adept in its mysteries. Her wound was well healed and it seemed that now it would be only a matter of a short time until only a slight scar would remain. Larry, fearing to overtax the girl's strength, had traveled slowly and had ordered frequent rests, so that now they were far advanced into the mountains, yet neither showed the slightest signs of fatigue.

He had no idea where they were, but since noon they had been following a more or less well-defined road that had wound down from the higher places toward low, rolling foothills, and just before the time of the sunset prayer they came out on a ledge of rock and looked off across a far-flung, level valley.

They camped for the night on the edge of the forest in the valley. Larry, ever since his decision to renounce his love for the girl's future, and the future of her people and, finally, for the future of Spain in Morocco, had found his lot a hard one; for Benna, with artless guile, had frequently put him to tests that well-nigh overwhelmed his rigid will, had almost torn down the barrier he had firmly

and conscientiously erected between them.

After their evening meal, while facing each other across their little fire, came a test greater than any that had preceded it, and it left him in anguish of spirit and all but forgetful of his high resolve.

"Larry, you have been cold to Benna these many days. Tell me, have I offended?" Or, is it that you are ill?"

He looked at her, a world of longing in his eyes.

"You have not offended, Little White Flower; nor am I ill. It is that I have been thinking."

With a graceful movement she came around the fire and sat beside him, dropping her hands over his and clasping them tightly.

"Then, love of my life, what do you think of? What is wrong?"

She was leaning close, warm little body touching his, lips inviting—eyes bidding him take her. Grimly, he set his teeth.

"Little White Flower," he said, striving not to be tender, but being more tender than he ever had been before, "I cannot tell you what is wrong; you would not understand—or, understanding, you would choose to do perhaps that which I could not permit. Let us say, then, that nothing is wrong; and forget the rest."

"If you mean forget the past, Larry, then I tell you it cannot be. I cannot forget that I love you. You—you still love me?"

Dumbly, his mind dazed, he looked at her and the pain in his eyes was such that it caused her to exclaim, as though something had wounded her. With a little, quick motion her hands stroked his cheeks and her soft, bell-like voice broke in little rings of sound on his ear.

"Ah, Larry, you need never answer in words when your eyes speak to me like that. But, heart of my life, something is changed about you."

He realized that if he were to conquer for all time his own spirit, if he were to assure her future, he must speak now.

"Once, Little White Flower, when you asked me why I came here, I told you it was for a great love, and when you asked me if the woman whose love had urged me was beautiful, I told you that it was no woman, but your father who held my love—a love of one man for another, a love, some say, that is the greatest in the world. But, Benna, Little Flower, it is in my heart now that I can deceive you no longer, and I wonder if you will understand when I say that I want to retract my former answer; that I want to say now, and say it distinctly, so that you cannot mistake my meaning—that woman you asked me about, Benna, *was beautiful!*"

With a little cry that might have come from the stricken heart of a bird, she shrank from him, swift surprise, mortal hurt, in her glorious eyes.

When the little blaze died down and threatened to go out she moved off from him and sought her sleeping place, removed by a dozen yards from his own. In complete silence she lay down. Larry, dumb misery racking his heart, sought his own sleeping place and lay far into the night wrestling with the urge that was in him to claim that which this girl offered; to take her as his own, for all time.

Once or twice, he fancied—he could not be sure—he caught the sound of a stifled sob. Dawn found him haggard of eyes and sick of soul. Benna, too, seemed not to have slept, and there was a redness about her lids that suggested much weeping.

They observed the morning prayer and ate their frugal meal, after which they resumed their journey. But the cheer was gone from the day and for the most part they strode onward in silence. They were still silent when, late in the afternoon, they discerned a little way ahead a low, white wall. The road they were on led directly toward an arched gateway in the wall, but the gate was closed tightly.

"See," said Benna, pointing, "we

are at the Gate of the Burning."

He followed with his eyes the direction indicated by her hand and saw, carved in the keystone of the arch, three words:

"Bab el Mahrouq."

Translated it read, "The Gate of the Burning."

Vividly he recalled the words of Bou Hamara, that at the Gate of the Burning there would be someone who watched and who waited to help. But, judging from the silence of the place, he did seem likely to pass through the gate.

A bell beyond the wall tolled, its quick clangor swelling briefly, then dying to silence. Lustily, he hammered on the gate, then heard a mocking voice:

"Has the wizard lost his powers that he cannot open so simple a thing as a gate that is unguarded?"

He looked up and saw an evil visage peering down at him from the wall. He had only a fleeting glimpse of the face before it disappeared, yet it was such a sinister, forbidding countenance that it sent a momentary chill down his spine. Involuntarily he stepped back apace.

His eyes went back to the gate and he saw where a lock might have been, a tiny aperture. Peering through this, he discerned some sort of mechanism inside that no doubt held the portal shut. He resolved on the instant to answer the challenge of the man on the wall and his hand went to his burnouse.

When it came out it held one of the little cubes he had been so careful about that first night in Morocco, in Omar ben Medjad's house where he had changed to Moorish raiment; also, he held a match. The cube was a piece of dynamite with an inch of fuse attached, no more.

He inserted the explosive in the aperture and struck the match, the while Benna stood aside silently, watching. Then she started as a sharp, quick blast roared through the silence and a gaping hole appeared in the gate.

Calmly, now, Larry thrust his shoulder against the gate and shoved. As it swung wide he stepped through, with Benna beside him. He saw armed men running forward, lances and long swords in their hands. None had rifles and he was glad of it, for it gave his automatic added power in case it became necessary to use it.

A *kaid el mia* who commanded the approaching soldiers strode up and glared at him fiercely, exclaiming in a loud voice:

"What manner of wizard are you that you bring down the thunder and the lightning from the sky to shatter our gates? Why did you not summon the gateman, that you might have entered without wrecking the portal."

And now, to Larry's supreme astonishment, the *kaid* did a strange thing. His face was turned away from the others, who were behind him, and only Larry and Benna could see it; his left eye-lid fluttered violently, then drooped in a prolonged and deliberate wink! At the same time a quick, reassuring smile shot across his bearded face!

"One will be watching, ready to aid——" Larry found Bou Hamara's words ringing like an echo in his ears. He looked at the *kaid* and spoke.

"I did sound a summons and for my pains one with the face of the devil did lean from the wall and mock me because I, a wizard, could not walk through an unguarded gate without assistance."

At this the *kaid's* face was perturbed briefly, then he winked again, quickly, and roared:

"Well, your last summons brought action, for the head *kaid* has ordered that it cost you your liberty. I am sent to take you and turn you over to the guards. Come, and make haste."

The *kaid* spoke to his men and they fell in around Larry and the girl, forming an escort. Rapidly they moved off through the walled village, nor paused until they came to a low, powerfully built mountain fortress above which a green, white and scar-

let flag was flying—the flag of the Marabout Group!

At the fortress another wall halted them, but a word from the *kaid* to the guard resulted in a wide gate swinging open and they marched inside to a paved court where soldiers stood or leaned, lances resting, swords hanging carelessly.

Through a high, wide door they were ushered, then down a flight of stairs and into a small room whose only light came from a solitary small barred window on a level with the surface of the earth outside. The heavy door banged behind them, then all was silence.

Larry, fingering his automatic and recalling briefly that he had about a dozen of his dynamite cubes left, wondered if he would be called on soon to use either of these weapons. He saw Benna drop wearily onto the only pile of cushions in the room, and look at him calmly. He forced a smile.

"Well, it seems that we are cornered temporarily, at any rate. It is in my mind that it were better if we had passed up this place, else I had fought it out with the guards at the gate."

"I know not which would have been best," she answered, a little dully, "for it has been in my mind for days now that nothing much matters with me."

He understood her and his heart surged with a sudden revival of the great love for her that was flooding his whole being. She noticed that he remained standing, and spoke again.

"Is it that you hate me so much you refuse even to sit beside me?" No longer did she call him Larry.

"It is not that, Little White Flower," he said softly. "I have a fancy that before long I shall receive a message, and it is in my mind that it will be given me through this window. I wish to be near when it comes. If, within the hour, nothing transpires, I shall find a way out of here if I have to summon the thunder and lightning again to my aid."

"You mean the explosive powder of the Spaniards?" she asked.

"Yes, only my powder is more powerful than that which the Spaniards place in their rifles."

She leaned back wearily, closing her eyes, apparently satisfied that he would get them out of their dilemma. Silently, he stood near the window, which was barely higher than his head.

Outside he heard footsteps approaching, then the voice of the muezzin sounded somewhere off in the darkness, calling the Faithful to prayer. The footsteps halted just outside the window and a figure dropped to the earth, forehead touching the dirt.

The singsong of the Moslem prayer began to drone through the window into Larry's ears. Subconsciously he noted that Benna had dropped asleep, and was, of course, unaware of the hour or the occasion.

He heard the voice of the man outside droning on, but something in the manner of his saying the words caught Larry's ear and he listened closely. No doubt of it, his message was come at last!

"Under the cushions is a bar. Use it to pry the window loose. Pass out through the east gate of the *kasbah,* saying when you are stopped, 'The Group.' At the Gate of the Burning, which is the only exit from the village, you must escape as best you can. You may have to fight your way through, remembering that a goodly thrust now and then will be forthcoming in your behalf. Once outside, hurry southward, where you will come to that which you seek and one who shall be nameless bids me tell you that you are now entering the valley which holds the Temple, and that henceforth you must summon your utmost powers as a wizard to combat the evils that will beset you. Do not leave this room until after the *acha,* the time of prayer after dark."

Larry spoke softly:

"And if I remain here, or am recaptured and brought back?"

"I shall do what I can to aid you, but you probably will have to face the Marabout of Adrar and your life and that of Allal Abdi will be forfeit. The holy man suspects that Allal's rise to power under the new order of things will doom the marabouts, and for that reason he has ordered the youth's death, and yours, also. The hour of prayer ends. I hasten away."

The time passed slowly until the call from the muezzin floated through the night, bidding all to the prayer after dark, when Larry rose softly and went to the window. He hoped there might possibly be further word from the *kaid*, who, without a doubt, was in league with Omar ben Medjad or Bou Hamara. But he heard only the soft murmurs of the *acha*, out in the gloom, and when at last silence fell again he walked back to Benna and touched her lightly on the shoulder.

She was awake instantly, regarding him with eyes that gleamed starlike in the gray gloom.

"I have received a message, Little White Flower. It said that beneath these cushions a bar is hidden, sufficiently strong for me to pry loose the window."

She rose quickly and scattering the cushions he found a short, thick piece of iron. Lifting it, he went to the window and inserted it beween the bars, prying with all the strength of his powerful muscles. Under the strain his shoulders hunched and his biceps bulged in great knots, then there came a tearing, ripping clatter and the frame, its bars intact, came loose and fell to the floor with a crash. Carefully, ears attuned to the sounds of the night without, he listened. Then he heard what apparently was only an echo of the night, yet he distinguished words:

"The east gate of the *kasbah*, then fight your way through the Gate of the Burning."

He knew the *kaid* had returned to make sure the pair was making a try for freedom. He turned and motioned for the girl to join him and catching her in his arms he lifted her toward the opening. The contact of her soft, warm body thrilled him, as it ever did, and he mastered an almost overpowering desire to hold her thus at least long enough to drink, once, of her lips. Subconsciously he realized that she was yielding in his arms, ready to turn and yield to him further. Miserable, his mind chaotic, he braced himself and helped her through the window. An instant later he followed.

A glance at the stars and he knew which way was east; now he caught her hand and they moved forward rapidly across the court. Quickly they rounded the end of the *kasbah* and faced a small gate, where a soldier with levelled lance stood guard. Larry said:

"The Group!"

On the words the guard swept his lance aside and pointed toward the outside. They hurried through, pausing only long enough to gain his bearings; then he turned north, in which direction he knew the Gate of the Burning lay and after a time they came to it. A knot of soldiers, lances resting against the wall, were there. The gate, Larry imagined, had been repaired. At least, it was again closed tightly.

He saw the *kaid*, the captain of a hundred who had winked at him, approach. The officer asked:

"The password?"

"The Group!" Larry said evenly, his heart pounding.

The *kaid* motioned for him to proceed, but before Larry and Benna could reach the gate the man of the evil visage joined them, crying sharply:

"*Kaid el-mia*, what would you? Know you not that the rules forbid anyone leaving the *karia* after the *acha?*"

Larry knew by the man's garb and bearing that he was nothing less than a *kaid el-raha*, captain of a thousand, therefore the other *kaid's* superior.

"But they had the password," the minor *kaid* said.

"Which is null after the *acha*, fool, save for entrance and exit at the *kas-*

bah. Ha, it runs in my mind that here is the pair we imprisoned today. Come to the light, that I may see your face."

Now, the wink which the *kaid-el-mia* threw at Larry was significant and he saw the fellow touch his sword silently, as though signalling. Larry knew that the time for action had come. With a single motion he whipped out the sword of Beni Ahmed and presented its tip at the other's throat, its needle-like point almost grazing the leathery skin.

"I have a special dispensation of a nature granted to all wizards to go and come as I please, spawn of filth, offspring of a thousand worms," he said, harsh menace in his voice. "Bid your guards open the gate and permit me to depart, or by tomorrow's dawn they are liable to choose a new captain of a thousand."

"Wizard or no," said the other, stubbornly, his face blanching at the thrust of the needle-point at his throat. "I am bade to hold you, and hold you I shall until one who is greater than I arrives on the morrow to judge you. If I die by your black magic, it is as Allah wills, but give the order, I shall not."

"Then, *kaid,*" Larry cried, his voice hot, his every nerve cool, "you are prepared to abide by the consequences?"

"*Ai,* though they be death itself."

"You are brave, but likewise you are a fool," snapped Harry, not having it in his heart to kill deliberately one of such courage, and his sword swung in a wide arc the while he leaped for the gate. He called to Benna, and she, her own sword out, came to his side. With a yell, the evil-faced *kaid* barked a swift command and the guard closed in for the attack.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VALLEY OF THE TEMPLE

LARRY, striving for the gate, found the way blocked by a score of swords, then he heard Benna's voice.

"Quickly," he heard her call, "cut your way forward while I guard the rear."

"Risk not your life, but hasten to one side," he replied, but knew as he spoke that she never would do this. Then he felt a momentary touch as her shoulders came against his back and he knew that, back to back with him, she would fight as long as she could hold her blade.

Beni Ahmed's sword swung about his head in gleaming arcs and its point soon dripped red from having gone home time after time with lightning-like flashes that were bewildering to his more clumsy opponents. Called on now to show at his best, his sword-play was little short of marvelous and soon guttural cries and groans sounded about him as wounded men, nursing their cuts, shrank away and opened a path down which he made progress toward the gate.

Once a man dropped with a gaping wound, whose body Larry had never touched, nor could Benna have sent home the thrust that felled him. He heard the head *kaid's* harsh tones:

"Look well where you strike, fool; you have laid out one of the guard."

Evidently here was another of Omar ben Medjad's promises, that of goodly secret thrusts, coming true. He found the gate was drawing nearer, then with a burst of speed, his blade flashing like living light, he literally carved his way forward until he saw the hard surface of the gate directly before him. Now, with a quick shifting of his body he turned and looked for Benna. He saw her, fighting valiantly, giving and taking thrusts that any man might have been proud of, but on the verge of succumbing to weight of numbers.

Hitherto he had been loath to use his automatic, but now, seeing the dire peril that threatened the girl he loved he threw his compunctious to the four winds and drew the gun. At its first barking blast a man dropped, kicked and lay still. Again and again, then once more it roared, then the wall of steel about Benna melted and was naught. Cries of fear sounded and men were running, seeking

safety off in the gloom. Larry called quickly:

"To me, Little Flower, to me!" Savagely, on the instant, he cursed himself for a doddering idiot, for if there was any who heard, he would recognize the fact that Larry had called, not as to a man, but as one would call to a woman. He hoped desperately that the breach had been overlooked.

Swiftly Benna joined him, her breath coming in short gasps and a tiny blotch of scarlet staining her burnouse above the old wound. The sight sent him literally into a frenzy and holstering his automatic he seized his sword and was among the retreating guards like a cyclone, striking and hewing with the savage ferocity of a tiger, with the speed and power of three men. He cleaved his way among them until once more they broke and fled to safety.

And now no further doubts were in their minds as to this man being a wizard. This magician, it was plain to be seen, was the greatest of them all, for who else save the very sultan of all the wizards could wield so mighty a sword, so destructive a blade?

Larry found himself alone in the midst of crumpled bodies, then he heard a chuckle and saw the *kaid el-mia* peering from behind a protecting pillar.

"Well done, O Youssef el-Habbassi; you fight better than the mightiest warrior. By Allah, you may be a wizard, but you strike like a soldier, or I am no judge of men. Go, the way is clear, and speed your going."

Larry found the gate ajar, no doubt more work of the *kaid,* and throwing a brief farewell through the night, he added a quick word of thanks, then was through the portal, Benna beside him. The girl would have dashed off swiftly, but Larry, his muscles steel by reason of the terrific urge that was on him, picked her up lightly—holding her as though she were a child—which, at that moment, she almost seemed to be, and dashed forward into the gloom coming almost instantly to the black, protecting wall of the forest.

Still he continued on, holding the girl lightly against him, nor did he pause for a full hour; then, beginning at last to feel the strain on his muscles, he paused beneath a stunted lotus tree, where the grass was long and the fallen leaves thick, and set her gently on her feet.

She looked at him with her star-like eyes in the gloom and he caught the faint murmur of her soft, liquid voice:

"How brave you are, Larry; how mighty! Truly, you are a man any woman might be proud of loving." Then, woman-like after the worst was over, she fainted.

Once again he was called on to minister to her, once again he brought forth his tiny medicine kit. Baring the old wound, he saw that it had opened at the bottom, where the cut had been deepest. He found no fresh marks, and was thankful. Before he had finished dressing her hurt she had recovered her senses and lay quiet as he fixed the last piece of tape. Putting his kit away, he dropped beside her and as he let the air enter his lungs in great mouthfuls, he realized finally how completely worn out he was.

Off in the night they heard a crashing in the underbrush and the clamoring of loud voices.

"Keep quiet, fools, and search diligently. He was carrying the boy and could not go far, for the lad was hurt. I saw blood on his burnouse."

It was the voice of the evil-visaged *kaid.*

"It is more probable that they will miss us. They are passing a good hundred yards distant. Quiet, Little Flower, and we shall escape them yet."

His spine bristled as a low whisper reached them, and with a rapid movement he reached his feet, automatic poised and waiting. The whisper reached them again:

"Peace, I mean you no harm. I merely come to give you a message."

It was the *kaid el-mia*. Larry gasped, astonished.

"How came you to find us?"

"I followed not far behind you, wizard. Listen to what I have to say. On your way south from here, through the valley, you will come to a hut, a filthy hovel, in which dwells a holy man. Go to him and use all your wizard's powers in befogging him, in creating mystery that he may not fathom in full. You will not know it, but this holy man will be the Marabout of Adrar, most powerful man in Moslem today under the Sultan. Let on at no time that you know him, remembering, however, that he will know you and that he will recognize Allal Abdi."

"I am to understand this message comes from Omar ben Medjad—is it not so?"

The other breathed a low assent, then:

"But now I must speak of that which brought me here more than any other single thing. I shall ask you a question and you must answer me truthfully, for all the plans of a great nation, the destiny of at least two people, depend on your reply. Tell me—is your companion a woman?"

Startled, Larry bit his tongue on the involuntary acquiescence that had sprung to his lips. Instead, he countered:

"Is not your question rather absurd, *kaid?*"

For answer the *kaid* gave his beard a peculiar twist and a certain grimace that was on his face dropped away, to be replaced by another that brought vividly to mind a countenance Larry had faced not many days since.

"Bou Hamara," he breathed. "You were the *kaid el-mia?*"

But the other was again working with his beard and again the lineaments of his face changing, so that when he looked at Larry a second time the latter gasped in utter amazement, for he was gazing into the face of none other than Omar ben Medjad!

"Now, Grenfall, my friend," Omar was saying, "I had not meant to let you know, but I see it is necessary. Come, I must hasten, and before I go I must have an answer to my question. You will forgive me for seeming rudeness, I know. At the gate you called your companion 'Little Flower.' You would speak so only to a woman. Now, I have long suspected that Allal Abdi is no man, so answer me, for, as Allah lives, the fate of Spain itself in Morocco may depend on what you say."

Before Larry could speak, Benna herself replied:

"Do not make him tell a lie, Omar ben Medjad. He has pledged his word and will carry through to the end. I will answer for him. Truly, I am a woman."

To Larry's surprise, Omar ben Medjad was affected strangely and mightily. His throat worked and his face went dead-white in the darkness beneath the trees. His breath, for the moment, came in gasps.

After a time, seemingly by great effort and sheer will power, he recovered some measure of his composure, then did a strange thing. Walking quickly to where Benna lay beneath the tree, he dropped to his knees beside her and looked curiously into her eyes; finally, he picked up her slender, bronzed hand and lifted it gently to his face, bowing his forehead against it silently. After a little he looked up at Larry.

"I am sorry, Grenfall, and I am glad. The whole course of our future plans must be changed from this moment as they regard restoring a certain person to the throne of the Seven Tribes. All else must go through as we planned, save that it now becomes necessary to find another true *sherif* of the blood." He turned again to the girl, looking into her velvety eyes.

"A woman may not rule the Berbers, as you know, and our plans are too great, the future of Morocco too precious, to permit of the risk that would attend you ascending the tribal throne disguised as a man. You will

not mind so much losing this great chance?"

Larry, listening for Benna's reply, was grateful from the depths of his heart for Omar's words to the girl, for they relieved him of a burden that was like to bear him down under its very weight of sorrow. The obstacle that had stood like a stone wall between himself and this dream-girl was now removed, completely and finally. Never again would it be built up and he was free now to worship at her feet once again, and not hide the fact that he did worship; he was free now to claim what she had to offer, and so unmistakably had shown him she did offer. He heard the girl's low-voiced response:

"I do not mind, Omar. I am glad, more so than I can say. I did not want the tribal throne, but all my life I have been schooled to believe that I must take it; all my life I have been taught that on my acceptance and carrying out of the great pretence depended the whole future of the Seven Tribes of the Berbers and —and—I was ready to renounce it anyhow, for something greater than a tribal throne, Omar, my friend, has entered my life, and the rulership of the Berbers seemed about to cost me my life's happiness."

"It is well," said Omar, and stooping gently he touched the girl's smooth forehead with his bearded lips, then rising he walked quickly to Larry. His hand went out and he grasped the American's, gripping it firmly.

"You love her, too, Grenfall?" His voice was low—too low for the girl to hear.

"Better than I love my life," Larry replied, huskily. The other's grip on his hand tightened.

"I see now where both of you were renouncing love for a thing you each thought greater than your own happiness. Allah be praised that I learned of this—that you called to her in a moment of forgetfulness at the Gate of the Burning. She must continue on with you, my friend, to the very end, for it is too late now for either of you to turn back. But from now on she travels simply as your assistant—there must be no further thought from either of you that she will ascend to rulership over the Berbers. Another shall be found, whom you shall both know in good time. Now, care for her, Grenfall, and love her deeply, for it is in the Berber blood to return love for love. I shall praise Allah forever that, since she is a woman, it is you, my dearest friend, who has won her heart. Now, I go. Hasten with the dawn to the hut of the Marabout of Adrar."

There was something about the voice of Omar ben Medjad that had a familiar ring to Larry's ears and, gripping the other's hand, he looked keenly into his face. Of a certainty he saw there a marked resemblance to a man he knew to be dead. On the impulse of the moment, he asked:

"What relationship was Ben Mansour to you, Omar?"

The other drew his hand away swiftly and rearranged his beard, gave a new twist to his face; Larry looked into the countenance of the *kaid el mia*. He heard the *kaid's* voice speaking:

"When Allah wills, the answer to your question shall be revealed to you. Now, I leave a packet of food," and with the words he vanished into the gloom of the forest.

Without words, but with his heart overflowing under his emotion Larry went to Benna and knelt down. Silently he extended his arms, allowing one of them to creep beneath her. He felt her give to his eager clasp, then knew that her arms, bare and gleaming white where her burnouse fell back from them, were about his neck. Once again he felt the hot, vivid contact of her lips on his; felt that subtle, all-surrendering yield of her body.

After a little he drew back slightly, gazing deep into her starry eyes.

"You know now, Little White Flower, why I lied to you, back there by the fire, and why I was ready to bury my own feelings forever to in-

sure the success of your future, dearest?"

She repeated the last word softly.

"That word is foreign to my ears, Larry, and I heard Omar ben Medjad call you by a strange name. Tell me truly—are you a Moor?"

Slowly he shook his head.

"Then, you are a *nasrani?*"

He wondered if there really were eagerness in her voice or if he imagined it. The girl had asked him if he were a Nazarene, or Christian, and instead of being horrified that she loved an infidel, her voice, unless he were greatly mistaken, betokened that she was glad!

"Truly, I am a *nasrani*, Little White Flower," he said gently. "Is that too much for you to overlook, dear heart?"

For answer, her arms clung to him tighter and her soft, fragrant lips brushed his.

"I shall tell you what has always been a secret to my father, my mother and myself, Larry. My father, while a youth, was sent by his father to a foreign land to be schooled. When he came back he was a *nasrani*. My mother learned of it when she married father, and in secret I was raised in your faith, light of my heart." She dropped her head against his breast. "Not that it could ever matter between us," she added, "but I wanted you to know that I, too, am a Christian."

"As you say, it could not matter," he told her. "Your religion could never separate you from me, Little Flower, unless you willed it so. But come, try to sleep. I shall rouse you with the dawn and we shall seek the hut of the Marabout of Adrar. Meantime, I must scheme, for unless I am well fortified with a plan, I shall be a sorry wizard indeed when I appear before the holy man."

In a little while she slept, then, because he had had little sleep himself during the last forty hours and in that time had gone through that which would have daunted an ordinary man, his own lids drooped and he, too, slumbered.

Dawn on his eyelids wakened him and after first making sure they were alone, he touched the girl gently on the shoulder, smiling softly into her eyes as she awakened.

A small packet, wrapped in leaves, attracted them and they opened it, to find food. It was the packet Omar had told them he was leaving.

After they had eaten and Benna assured him she felt as strong as ever she had, he judged their direction by the sun and headed directly south, walking steadily.

It was nearing noon when they emerged from the thick foliage of the forest and entered a tiny clearing wherein set a hut, vine-covered and weighted with a burden of flowers. They saw a tall, emaciated man with a hideous, wrinkled visage peer out at them through the vines, and now a replica of Methuselah himself emerged from the hut and stood silently before his door.

Appearing not to have noticed the man, Larry, a brilliant scarlet poppy blossom palmed in his hand, casually reached down and grasped a snow-white asphodel, plucking it from its stem. In his fingers, before the watching eyes of the holy man the snowy petals suddenly seemed to change into those of the scarlet poppy.

As though he still had not seen the marabout he tossed the poppy to the earth and shook his burnouse above it. When the folds of his garment dropped back in place, the poppy had changed to a purple convolvulus. Still moving his hands he now tossed a white object into the air and as it settled toward the earth it was revealed as a piece of ordinary cloth, but even as it dropped it seemed to change and a crow, black as the bottom of a mountain tarn at midnight, rose on wings that spread widely and soared off, croaking hoarsely as it went. Watching it go, Larry wondered if all the trouble he had gone to, to trap the bird back in the forest, would go for naught, or if the sleight-of-hand had made any impression on the holy man.

Now, as though he had just seen him, he looked at the marabout and observed with satisfaction that the holy man was watching him with wide, startled eyes. As the marabout found Larry's eyes upon him he spoke, and his voice was not unlike the croakings of the crow he had just seen vanish in the forest.

"*Ai,* wizard; whence come you and whither do you go? Pause in your journey and read me the future. It has been whispered that you were coming."

Larry sought by his words to mystify the holy man further.

"*Ai,* Father of Wisdom, it has been whispered that I was coming and that a student in the art of wizardry accompanied me. Likewise, it was whispered in your ears that I had been slain by Berber outlaws in the shadows of *el-Dholl;* and it was whispered to you that I did not die on the Mountain of Shadows, being protected by Allah, but made my way to a *karia* in the valley, where I had been imprisoned. Now it was whispered to me that you were coming to the *kasbah* and, usurping powers of one greater than you, pass judgment upon me. You see, I have heard things, too."

"You are, indeed, a wizard," the other replied.

"*Ai.* Had I been aught else I would not be talking here with you now. What is it that you wish of me?"

"Read me the future, if wizard you be, and if it is to my liking there will be an unexpected reward for you."

The aged holy man turned and reentered his hut. Larry, with Benna at his side, followed. He whispered in her ear:

"I shall try not to do so, but I may call on you for assistance. If I do, use your woman's wit and be guided by what I suggest."

He felt the quick, gentle pressure of her fingers on his arm, then found himself in the marabout's hut, out of the rich, golden sunlight and in a place of twilight and shadows. The marabout had already seated himself, cross-legged, on the floor of the barren, squalid hut.

Larry and Benna squatted cross-legged before him.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MARABOUT OF ADRAR.

LARRY, aware that the keen, beady eyes of the marabout were upon him, realized that he faced, perhaps, the greatest test that had confronted him thus far. This ancient, wrinkled man, who by nature of his calling should have been devoting his whole life to religious things, was really the arch schemer of the Marabout Group.

Too, this marabout knew Benna—knew her, that is, as Allal Abdi, aspirant to the *sherifcy* of the Seven Tribes of the Berbers. He had a fleeting thought that if this wrinkled villain could be told some way, made to understand somehow, that Benna no longer was to be looked upon as an obstacle in the road of the maraboutic success, these vultures of the hills would, perforce, cease their persecutions of her. He resolved, if the opportunity presented, to impress on the Marabout of Adrar this paramount fact.

Although his brain was seething and his heart was pounding, Larry allowed no trace of his strife of mind to betray itself in his face; quite calmly he sat, his eyes fixed on those of the marabout in an unwavering, wide-orbed stare. From the first he had set himself to subjugate the other's mind, knowing that the success of what he would demonstrate depended almost wholly on his power to hypnotize this wreck of what had once been a superb specimen of Berber blood.

During the journey through the forest that morning he had paused, while Benna watched in amazement, and arranged certain things beneath his burnouse. One of these was a small packet and, overcoming her compunctions, she had helped him to fill this literally to overflowing with black and green and scarlet bugs;

tiny, large and medium insects of varied hue and kind. She could not imagine what he wanted with them, but, as was her wont where Larry was concerned, she had not questioned; neither had she asked any reason when he trapped a tiny, snowy osprey, a baby chick only beginning to get the feel of its wings and as yet unable to fly more than six or eight feet at a time.

Many other things she had seen him arrange beneath his burnouse, exclaiming in horror when he boxed a vicious-looking, semi-poisonous spider. She wondered how he had contrived to conceal so much without causing his burnouse to bulge in places. Now, seated near Larry, Benna watched the duel of eyes that was going on in the gray twilight of the squalid, filthy hut and her virgin heart, swelling with hot Berber love for this man who had come to mean so much to her, sent up a little prayer that he might be successful in all that he undertook.

Larry drew his wands from beneath his outer garment and dropped them in his lap, not daring to take his eyes from those of the marabout. He had that unconscious feeling that comes to all hypnotists when they are succeeding in their art, that the holy man of Adrar was gradually succumbing to the power of his eyes. Suddenly, his voice a low, monotonous drone, Larry spoke:

"As Allah lives, you have asked me to read you the future, O Father of Wisdom, and it is in my mind that I see a great confusion in the Berber hills; that I see men thick as bugs in the forest gathering and massing for something that is not yet clear to me. But they are many, aye, as many as the very bugs that are even now beginning to crawl over you, through the wrinkles of your skin, beneath the folds of your garments," and as he spoke his hand, with the speed of living light, left his lap and moved, a vague, fleeting shadow, before the marabout's face.

Now as it fell quiet in his lap the marabout on the instant seemed literally alive with crawling things—bugs, green and black and scarlet; large and small, of every hue and kind. They swarmed across his bony legs, up his wrinkled belly and into his long, filthy beard; they were on his face and in his ears, in his hair—he screamed, a shrill, fear-filled cry, when they crawled across his eyes and into his mouth!

With a weak, tottering motion the marabout rose, clawing at his face, sputtering and combing his matted beard with fingers that were like claws. With little pats, like raindrops falling on a lotus leaf, the bugs dropped and hit the dirt floor, and as they struck they scurried with the speed of light toward the darkness of the walls. Like flashes they had come, like flashes they disappeared.

Shaking, the marabout looked down as the last bug disappeared in the darkness, and seeing no living thing save Larry and Benna, he regained his composure in some measure. Again he sat down, cross-legged as before, and now his eyes, meeting Larry's, held little hidden fear-lights, and his face was pale through its filth.

Larry's monotone droned again:

"Aye, I see much, son of holiness, and I see marabouts, a little group of them, in a hidden valley. They seem as a great spider, and their arms reach out—many arms—even as many, by Allah, as has the spider that at this moment crawls up your leg. Move not, and the spider is harmless; grasp it, and the spider stings. So it is with the marabouts; their wills, unopposed, they sit unctious and scheming, like the spider on your leg, but see, they move, they feel they are oppressd, they feel the time is coming to sting, and—ah!" His voice trailed off dreamily as the marabout, gazing fascinated at a great, mottled spider which seemingly had come from nowhere and perched on the arch of his bent knee, moved with a frightened screech and with one mighty swoop of his claw-like hand beat at the insect.

At the contact of the beating claw

the spider stung, then, swept aside by the force of the marabout's blow, it landed with a little *thupp* somewhere off in the gloom by the wall. Now, a tiny phial, filled with a brownish-black liquid, set where the marabout's leg had rested and Larry's voice was droning again:

"I see poison in the sting of the marabouts—poison for a great nation that seeks to be friendly; but, see, the sting has taken effect where it was least expected—not the *nasrani*, but Islam, has felt the tug of the poison and now the great nation, its heart going out to its stricken friends, offers an antidote. If the Marabout Group picks up the antidote and applies it to the sting, the poison of the wound will be as naught; if the Group disregards the antidote, woe to the Group."

He saw the holy man was following his parable, saw the villain looking at the phial, then saw his shaking, claw-like hand move out and clutch it. The cork was drawn and the liquid applied lavishly to where the spider had stung. The liquid stung in turn and the marabout's croaking scream dinned through the hut. Larry monotoned:

"Truly, those who sin must be punished and if the great nation, helping wounded Moslem, also chastises, yet in chastising does cleanse and cauterize, is it not well? Let the sting of the antidote be endured, for it is brief, and it is healing."

He knew that the iodine in the little phial, which contained also some permanganate of potash, would effectually neutralize the poison of the spider, which was not a very poisonous one at that; he knew also that the sting of the stuff would pass quickly and he waited calmly until the marabout's pain had ended and saw the wrinkled villain's eyes on him again. Now stark, naked fear was in their depths.

Staring directly at the other, repeating over and over words in a monotone, he saw the marabout's eyes film while the lids fluttered briefly. He knew in that instant he had conquered the other's mind. Swiftly he pointed.

"Look—look at yon wall, O Father of Wisdom, and see the future that you asked me to read for you."

Forced to do his best, Larry literally reached superlative heights, for with the marabout hypnotized he knew that in the powers of his own description lay the success of the pictures he would cause the holy man to see on the wall, and so he began to talk, and as he talked the marabout saw a cloud sweep away from the wall while forms and fancies took shape and being there.

First, he saw two battles raging between the same forces, but with an invisible dividing partition separating them. The battle to the left was being waged with an intensity that knew no bounds and in the van of the Moorish battalions the marabout saw the Wizard of the Hills and Allal Abdi. Occupying the same position and fighting the same fight he saw them also in the battle that was going on to the right.

But now there occurred that which literally could mean only that a lesson was being drawn for the holy man, for in the battle on the left a treacherous knife-thrust from a Moorish soldier laid Allal Abdi still in death, while a lance thrust from a similar quarter killed the wizard; as though this were a signal, the opponents of the Moorish armies, which the holy man saw now were Spanish soldiers, swarmed forward and the forces of Moslem were routed utterly, fleeing in a thousand directions and pursued all the while by the deadly Spanish rifle fire.

In the battle on the right, once, twice, thrice treacherous attempts to kill Allal Abdi and Larry were turned aside by a marabout, and each time this occurred the armies of Moslem won fresh successes against the Spaniards, and when, after a time, a concerted attempt by a group of slave soldiers to kill the pair was frustrated, the Spanish ranks broke before a mighty Moslem charge and the battalions of the marabouts

rolled triumphantly across the valley, routing the fighters in the blue and red uniforms at all points.

Obviously, it was a lesson. Youssef el-Habbassi and his companion, Allal Abdi, must live; their deaths, it had been shown, meant complete failure of the maraboutic movement toward power.

The scene changed. A mighty fortress loomed against a hill of vivid green and its walls parted so that they advanced until they stood in a great room, inside of what appeared to be a Moorish castle. Here were gathered a group of marabouts and, yes, by Allah, the Sacred Eye was in plain view! Furthermore, Allal Abdi wore it!

Fascinated, the holy man leaned forward, his breath coming in whistling gasps. He saw Allal Abdi being adjured to take the tribal throne, to ascend to the *sherifcy* of the Seven Tribes of the Berbers; then, wonder of wonders, he saw the youth assemble the marabouts about him and pass directly into their hands the Eye, waving aside the great, raised seat that was the tribal throne! He saw the marabouts ascend to the seat, while Allal Abdi walked down among the great concourse of people who were gathered and disappear.

No plainer could anything have been shown. Truly, the Marabout of Adrar could see that Allal Abdi did not aspire to rule the Berbers; that he did not seek the power now held by the marabouts, therefore could not be their enemy. This lesson, added to that driven home by the vision of the twin battles, left an indelible mark on the marabout's mind.

Suddenly Larry's voice died and the wall became blank. He reached out, at the same time snapping his fingers before the other's face. The holy man awoke with a jerk and rapidly regained his normal senses. He gazed at Larry with eyes that held not a little of awe. His croaking voice sounded:

"Of a truth, you are the greatest of all the wizards, and that which I did see of the future leads me to give you a message. It is this: certain things shall not come to pass as previously ordained, and if you know the youth Allal Abdi and tell him this, he will understand."

Now Larry played his trump card. His hands again came from under his burnouse, but apparently they were empty. His voice dinned softly through the thick silence of the hut:

"The words of the Father of Wisdom shall be tested. A white spirit, which shall come to me and take the form of a tiny osprey, shall leave your beard. If the spirit flies through the door and far away, disappearing from our ken, then shall the Compassionate One have made you out a liar; if, on the other hand, the spirit shall flutter, as though loath to leave you, then shall Allah have verified your every word."

He leaned forward and passed his hands before the marabout's face with a rapid gesture, then leaned back. A startled look swept the marabout's features as his beard suddenly heaved and fluttered. Then from the tangled mass of grizzled hair there darted a tiny, baby osprey, its feathers as white as driven snow. With a frightened chirp it took to the air, beating valiantly with its ludicrously undersize wings, striving mightily to hold altitude, only to succumb to its own weight before it could reach even the doorway, a scant dozen feet distant.

It struck the earthen floor and teetered, panting, on tiny, pink-toed feet, its little head bobbing from side to side. Then, hopping, it calmly went out into the sunlight where they could see it wavering, as though taking its bearings. Larry looked at the marabout and found the ancient villain's eyes regarding him with awed fear.

"The message of the spirit is that you spoke truly, holy one. It is well."

Superstition and mystery are life itself to the marabouts, and Larry knew this, therefore he played to the limit on the gullibility of this an-

cient villain. He knew that, as a result of this demonstration, his fame would go forth over the land in louder tones than ever; he knew also that in all probability Benna would now be free of the menace of a long Moorish knife-thrust in the dark. As for himself, he could not tell. It was possible, even probable, that he had made himself out as so formidable that the marabouts would deem him a source of danger to themselves and order his early removal.

As the thought of the girl flitted through his mind he turned his eyes and glanced toward her—that is, he gazed toward where she had been sitting when he had hypnotized the marabout. But she was not there!

Red rage flared across his vision. He scented a marabout trick, yet he could not understand how it had come about, for he was certain—as certain as he was that he was standing there—that the Marabout of Adrar had had nothing to do with the disappearance.

He became on the instant a fighting man. His wizard's character dropped from him like the shadows dropped from *el-Dholl* with the approach of dawn. His long, slender sword came singing from its scabbard and flew in a whistling arc about his head, to come to a pause with its point pricking the throat of the marabout. His voice, when he spoke, was thick and heavy:

"Father of filth, offspring of jackals, what has become of my companion?"

At this the marabout turned astonished eyes on the spot where Benna had sat, even as he shrank from the menace of the sword's point. Now he turned and looked at Larry, and the latter could see the truth in the beady, fear-stricken eyes when he answered:

"*Ai*, the youth sat there when last I glanced that way. I swear by Allah and the hope of heaven that I know not where he went, nor how."

And Larry realized that the man spoke truly, whereupon, with a great rage in his brain and a great wound in his heart, he sped to the door and looked outside, across the tiny, sunlit clearing. But the only sign of life that met his gaze was a tiny, white osprey chick, twittering and hopping, flitting and wavering, making hesitating little flights toward the green, vivid wall of the forest.

He turned back to the marabout and spoke swiftly:

"The youth, my assistant, has disappeared. I follow to seek him. Look well, holy man, that you recall the message you gave me concerning one Allal Abdi, else Allah alone can stay the vengeance that will be visited upon you and yours."

"I have spoken. Go, and bid the youth Alla Abdi fear not."

Larry bounded across the sunlit clearing, the last words of the marabout ringing in his ears.

His mind was in a turmoil and he knew not which way to turn. Swiftly, he made a complete circle of the marabout's hut, then, on the southern side, he found what appeared to be a dim, crooked pathway, twisting off through the trees and the undergrowth. His reason told him that down this thoroughfare Benna probably had gone—either of her own free will or because she had been compelled to go. He plunged in headlong pursuit.

As he ran he sensed that twilight was coming down on the countryside; soon the hot, red orb of day would lose itself beyond the barren peaks toward the west and then would come a period of intense, blue-black night ere the golden moon came up. Unless he could find some trace of Benna, reach some habitat of mankind before this darkness came, he knew he was apt to lose the entire night before he could hope to find any tangible clues as to whither the girl had gone.

Madly he raced along, eyes watching the path in the gathering gloom, seeking to find some sign that Benna had come this way.

Then he heard a ripping blast of sound and a rush as of a mighty wind. A tree branch dipped and

swayed before him and a giant blotch seemed to grow out of the night, launching itself directly at him!

Only his agile youth saved him from what would have been certain death. Unable to vision that which had attacked him, yet nerves and muscles co-ordinating as one, and realizing that he was in dire peril, he made a wide, sweeping leap sidewise into a clump of scrub balsam, landing on the balls of his feet before dropping to earth and rolling over and over.

He heard a reverberating thud, as though a heavy, compact mass had struck the ground he had just deserted!

CHAPTER XIV

THE STRIPED DEATH

THROUGH the scrub balsam he glimpsed a giant hulk, weaving and twisting in the deepening gloom; heard a snarling cry, followed by a hiss that might have come in concert from a thousand hooded cobras! He saw the hulk move toward him and two vivid green points of light g l e a m e d through the undergrowth. He saw the hulk take shape; a long, rakish body with a twisting, weaving tail and cat-like poise.

Subconsciously, he recalled that eerie night in Ben Mansour's house, when the messenger had turned at the window and tossed backward the tiny replica of a tiger; he recalled, too, that Mansour had picked it up and remarked about it—had called it the Striped Death.

But where, in the name of all that was holy, had the animal come from? Then, dimly there filtered through his racing thoughts a paragraph he had written in one of his own books:

It is a common practice of the wizards of the outlying lands to purchase the fiercest of tigers while they are yet tender cubs. The wizards then train these ferocious beasts, much as we train our dogs, and use them to further their schemes, whether of the common mystic kind, or of more nefarious natures. It is said, but has never been verified, that some of the marabouts, worried because of the inroads the wizards are making in the matter of winning the following of the people, have also adopted the tiger method of subjugating those who oppose them, and some strange tales come out of Morocco as a result of these practices.

Here, then, unless all his studies had gone for naught, unless he was a preacher of false wisdom and a follower of lying history, was one of the trained tigers of the Atlas—the striped death of the mountains! There was no question in his mind but that this brute, its livid jaws agape, was a trained killer.

He saw its fiery eyes gleam greenly as it approached his covering in the scrub balsam, and he sensed that one of its great claw-clad paws, the claws distended, was raised and prying tentatively among the thorny branches. He struck with Beni Ahmed's sword and was rewarded with a roar of surprise, rage and pain from the tiger. He saw it leap back swiftly, its tawny tail weaving like the undulations of a cobra, then his hand went beneath his burnouse and came forth with a tiny piece of dynamite and a single match. Silently, he was blessing the foresight that had caused him to bring to Morocco those twelve cubes of the explosive that he had originally started with. One he had used at the gate of the burning. Therefore, he must have eleven left.

Carefully he judged the distance, then struck the match. As the short fuse sputtered he arose to his feet, standing shoulders and head above the scrub balsam, having free play for his swinging right arm. Straight at the tiger the hissing, spluttering ball of chained destruction hurtled. The tiger leaped an instant before the explosive arrived, but not quickly enough to totally escape.

Came a blinding, short-lived flash and a sharp detonation; a prolonged wail from the tiger and a shrill, air-blasting yowl; there was a threshing of the great body, then the pad, pad, pad of running feet. Straining his

eyes, Larry saw the brute making off through the forest, its great body sagging in the middle. But he knew that the dynamite had not reached home and that, just so soon as the animal recovered, it would come back, once more seeking, stalking him through the gloom of the forest.

Rapidly he made his way down the path; but now he allowed his feet to guide themsleves through the darkness, for his eyes watched with avid interest the low-hanging branches that webbed the gloom above his head. For the most part these were too small to hold even a third of the weight of the striped death, but when he came to limbs that might easily have held the beast, he stepped aside carefully from the path.

The gloom had deepened and blackness that was thick and stifling came down around him. It was impossible to see a dozen feet ahead, and when, after a time, he came to a tall, slender eucalyptus tree he paused beneath it, shifting his sword so as to make climbing easier. Three minutes later he was twenty feet up the bole, ensconced at a junction of limb and trunk, listening silently to the night life of the forest.

Soon he heard the soft *thud, thud, thud* of padding feet. The killer was on the scent, stalking him! He drew forth one of the dynamite cubes and held it lightly in his hand, visioning subconsciously that he now had only ten of the cubes left.

He heard a rustling at the foot of the eucalptus, felt the tree shiver as though a mighty wind had touched it briefly. He knew the killer had found him and was wondering as to the advisability of making the upward spring, a spring that would land him a good fifteen feet above the ground; then, his great claws digging into the hole, it could finish the remainder of the d i s t a n c e rapidly.

Straining his eyes downward, he made out two tiny points of green, a half dozen yards beneath him. He started to strike his match, but caught himself. It would doubtlessly result in the tiger leaping immediately to one side; also it would be a waste of precious ammunition, for the killer, seeing the match flare, would, of course, remember that former burning blast and move swiftly to escape a second baptism of fire and sound.

The green points of light below him remained sationary. The tiger was gazing upward at him, making its plans, preparing either to spring or walk away to cogitate further. He decided to try his automatic, though he had no faith in its power against this giant beast. He found the cold butt of the gun in his hand and aimed by sheer instinct at the green lights below. His finger pressed the trigger and a stream of fire gushed through the night, while a living splay of leaden pellets hurtled downward with all the force of the power which hurled them.

He heard a terrific, s n a r l i n g scream; knew his bullets had gone home, wounding the beast, at least. Then he was almost unseated by a blow that struck the tree. The bullets evidently had decided the tiger, for it had sprung, instantly, relentlessly, and was even now clawing upward through the branches!

He struck a match and as its glow flared through the darkness of the night he saw the head of the beast, blood-covered, jaws wide parted, breath literally blasting the silence with fierce hisses, not more than a yard below him!

He wondered if the fuse would burn to the dynamite in time, and with no time to give heed to the outcome he dropped the sputtering, sizzling messenger of death straight downward, directly t o w a r d the snarling, gaping jaws!

Came a terrific report and again the eucalptus shook, nearly unseating him; then sounded a noise as of a world gone mad, of a thousand devils in mortal agony. He heard a loud, thumping thud and a snarling, wailing cry at the foot of the tree, and drawing forth another piece of

dynamite he slid a yard down the tree and struck another match, shielding it so as to throw the light downward.

He saw the tiger, with a portion of its head blown away, thumping about the ground. He realized that the beast was fighting in the throes of death, yet, living up to its nature, was dying hard. It was conceivable that this giant hulk, in its final agonies, might shake him from the tree, might even crash the slender trunk to earth.

The great beast was sinking to its side, the eye that remained unharmed fast losing its brilliant, vivid green. He saw the rump stay up to the last, then, before the match died, he saw the beast collapse supinely and lay still. For an hour he held to his perch, ears alert for the slightest sound below, distrustful that even the terrific bombardment he had poured on the tiger had finally killed it.

At the end of that time the low-hanging, golden moon crept up over the eastern Atlas and its slanting beams sent little slivers of liquid silver through the forest, giving the trees and undergrowth an elusive, goblin appearance that, while beautiful, was also a little fearful. As the beams lengthened and grew stronger he made out the tiger and saw that it had not moved from its last collapse.

Cautiously, he descended from the tree and stepped to the side of the giant beast. With his foot he turned the great head slightly and was startled at the damage his charge of dynamite had inflicted. The lower jaw, one side of the head, even the eye and ear, had been blown away, allowing the gray-tinged brain to ooze from the skull; and despite this awful wound, the tiger had not died soon—in fact, only his second dynamite shot had put the final quietus on it.

On the spur of the moment he drew his long Moorish knife from his sash and with a quick, sharp stroke clipped off the dead beast's good ear, close to the head. The brute had been dead so long by now that the piece of silken skin did not bleed. He tucked it beneath his burnouse, then, swinging his sword to a more comfortable position, found the pathway, gleaming dimly in the moonlight, and resumed his journey.

As he went on the moon rose higher and finally it stood straight over him. He imagined it had not risen until nine or after, and that by now it probably was around three in the morning. He felt no fatigue, no desire for sleep. Thoughts of Benna filling his mind, nothing else could gain foothold in his brain.

After a time the trees grew thinner and he saw far ahead, how many miles distant it would have been impossible to judge, a needle-like peak standing against the moon-bathed horizon. His way seemed to be leading directly toward this. Suddenly it seemed that the peak had sprung into flame, as though a fiery volcano had broken from the very crest of the sharp point.

He paused, startled and wondering, then realized that here was no volcano, but a man-made light; but for all that a most mysterious light. Brilliantly red, it rose and died, went out briefly, then flicked into life again, for all the world like a giant's eye that was winking at him sardonically. Something about the shape of the light, and its color, too, seemed familiar and he found himself puzzling over what this resemblance could be. But he could lose no time dreaming here over a mysterious light; he was seeking Benna. He moved onward again.

He was heading straight toward the light, and as he traveled its fiery, red beams swelled and died, winked out briefly, then flared again. He wondered if it were to continue indefinitely and what its object was. Then it died out utterly and only the brilliant glow of the now waning moon lit the scene—a scene that was the epitome of gloom and mystery.

He imagined he could hear soft

voices calling out there in the night, on either hand, then cursed himself for a fool, chiding himself that he had not recognized on the instant the lazy tones of the osprey or the more guttural voices of the lapwings. Steadily he went ahead.

When he was beginning to forget the light, it sprung up again, brighter, deeper in its brilliant redness. The moon was now a sickly thing that barely lingered in the west, and he had the curious feeling that comes to all men who are up at night, just before the dawn. He found himself speculating on whether the red Moroccan sun would be topping the distant mountain peaks in two hours or three.

The light on the peak flared brilliantly again, literally sending a crimson streak through the gathering of the darkness that comes in that space of time when the moon has set and the sun has not yet risen —the hour or two that precedes the dawn. Looking at it, Larry found it blinded his eyes, and he raised his left hand to shield them.

With the motion his hand seemed to catch on fire, literally to blaze with a crimson flame. Startled, he jerked his hand back, then gasped in realization.

The ring on his finger! The Eye of the Prophet!

Boldly he stuck his hand forth, the stone in the ring turned fairly toward the light on the peak. And he found the ring a living mirror in which all the fantasies of the greater light were reflected. As the light on the peak flared and ebbed, so did the ring, and when the greater light dulled and seemed to throb like blood pulsing through a beating heart, the ring on his finger dulled and throbbed in unison. Curiously, as he continued to walk onward, he watched this phenomena, and somehow came to feel that here was something he had discovered; that there was some direct connection between the ring on his finger and the mysterious light on the peak.

The light on the distant sliver of the mountain flared high, thrice, and thrice it died out to nothing, and thrice the ring reflected the flare and the subsequent darkness. After the third flare the light was gone and remained blanketed.

He wondered if he would ever find human habitation in this wilderness, then stopped short, for he had almost fallen over a crouching, salaaming figure in the pathway before him!

Startled, his hand dropped to his sword, then, seeing the fellow remained in an attitude of supplication or homage, he drew back a pace. It was too early for the *fedjr*, the time of prayer at dawn, so the kneeling man could not be at his prayers. Larry spoke, using the familiar guttural Chleuh of the hills:

"Why kneel there, Unknown One? Arise, that I may pass."

"*Ai*, wizard, may Allah bless you that you bade me rise and did not strike my unworthy head from my shoulders with the long sword that hangs at your side. You have been long in coming, but I praise Allah you are here."

"And how did you recognize me?"

"How, wizard; how indeed! Is the one good eye of Youcoub el-Bachir so like its fellow that is gone that he did not see the Eye of the Prophet sending its message back through the night to the Great Eye on the mountain? That it did not see the Eye of the Prophet on your finger answering the message of the Great Orb? *Ai*, not only did old Youcoub el-Bachir see this, but it is in my mind that the Marabout Group itself, sitting in the Temple, did catch the message the Eye on your finger did flash through the night. Welcome, thrice welcome, blessed of the Prophet, to the sacred ground of the Temple. You were, as I have intimated, expected. You seem to have been delayed."

His brain racing under the multiplicity of mystery, Larry answered as best he could:

"And why do you say that, Youcoub el-Bachir?"

"Because your companion, the youth Allal Abdi, the goodly one who has, we are already told, renounced his right to power in favor of the Marabout Group, did precede you by a full half-night. Aye, he has already passed this way, in company with one who was taking him to the Temple. And there was one who came behind them, one with a bold eye and a reckless manner. This last bade me tell you that you would find the youth in the Temple, awaiting your coming."

Taking a step forward, Larry's powerful fingers crushed into the bony shoulder of Youcoub el-Bachir, and his voice sounded like the grinding of steel on steel.

"Make yourself plainer, Youcoub el-Bachir, for even a wizard, wearied from a long night in the forest, worn with a terrific battle with the striped death, cannot always be clear-minded enough to grasp one's every meaning."

Whereupon the other answered:

"I can only say further, that the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan did pass this way a half hour behind the youth Allal Abdi and his captor, and he did bid me say to you that your road still lay south and that it would end soon now in the Temple, where you will also find Allal Abdi waiting for your coming."

The Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan! Larry had never heard of the fellow, but his message, the word he had left, somehow seemed to have a familiar ring; yes, by the gods, the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan was Omar ben Medjad. But if so, who had spirited Benna away from the marabout's hut? And who was it that had brought her through the forest, to imprison her in the Temple?

Mystery piled on top of mystery! Larry's weary brain reeled under the task of trying to pierce through this veil of intrigue. He turned his eyes back to the other.

"Tell me, Youcoub el-Bachir, will you give me food and provide me with a place where I may rest?"

"*Ai*, who am I to be so honored that the great wizard, Youssef el-Habbassi, who commands even the bugs of the forest to crawl, the spiders to sting and the spirits to turn to birds, should sleep in his domicile? Of a surety you may have a place to rest, and food."

Larry, following the fellow into a squalid, dirty hut, wondered how word of his affair with the Marabout of Adrar had so quickly reached this place, and the ears of this man, especially. Inside he was given food and a couch. Too tired to smoke the cigaret Youcoub el-Bachir offered, he threw himself on the couch and closed his eyes. Dreamily his host's voice reached him:

"Is it true that you met the striped death of the Marabout of Adrar back in the forest?"

Despite himself, Larry started. So the ancient villain back in the hut had sent the killer on his track! Assured that Benna was safe far ahead, he had struck on the instant to rid himself and his colleagues of the power of the wizard! Larry allowed a grim chuckle to escape his lips and held out the ear of the tiger.

He heard the other's startled exclamation, then, as he placed the silken flap back beneath his burnouse, he heard the other's voice:

"Here, indeed, is a wizard whose powers are only under those of Allah, for his magic has done the striped death to its ultimate finish."

Again, just before he dropped asleep, Larry heard Youcoub speak.

"By Allah, he sleeps, and it is well. Here is one more powerful, mayhap, than the Marabout Group itself. It were well, it is in my mind, if his wings were clipped while there is time. Well, if he were to die now, the people, who have heard of him and his great powers, would wonder. It is best, after all, to leave him for the Gate of the Daggers and, passing that, to the Ordeal. Even his wizard's magic will not avail him there."

Larry, conscious only long enough to digest the possible import of this statement, which, he felt, Youcoub had not thought his ears would catch,

dropped into deep, soul-satisfying slumber.

CHAPTER XV.

THE EYE OF THE PROPHET

LIGHT shrouded the valley; a soft wind sighing through the forest wakened to life a thousand banshee voices, set the twigs of the dead lotus trees a-rattle and swept with eerie murmurs across the barren crags of the mountains. A mist was over the moon, so that the valley from end to end was bathed in a mellow, lemon-glow.

Larry, having slept the clock around, awoke with a feeling of ravenous hunger, then thoughts of Benna, Omar ben Medjad, the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan and, lastly, Youcoub el-Bachir, flitted through his mind. Of his late host there was no sign, but near at hand, in the deep gloom of the hut, was a taboret holding coffee and some figs. He felt beneath his burnouse, but could not sense any loss of paraphernalia, therefore he took it for granted that he had not been searched while he slept. He made especially sure that his little dynamite cubes and his automatic were in place. Then, obeying the mandate of his inner man, he swallowed the food, to the last morsel.

Youcoub el-Bachir did not return and after a time Larry drew his sash tight, shifted his sword and stepped out into the soft velvety night. Unless he were decidedly mistaken, the Marabout Group ere now knew of his arrival, and despite the words of the holy man of Adrar, he had a feeling that danger, sharp and deadly, was just ahead, awaiting his coming.

He stepped out briskly, at the same time noting that the forest was gradually falling away. It was as though he were coming to a cleared place. He was glad the trees were thinning, for just so long as they closed in about him he knew he would have that creepy feeling of being followed, of eyes upon him, perhaps eyes that even now were choosing the point between his shoulders where a long, Moorish dagger would thrust its way home. Under the urge of this last illusion he accelerated his pace and found himself moving at a rapid trot through the night.

Unconsciously his eyes kept returning after each sidewise glance to the peak, and suddenly he realized that for the last hour he had been waiting for that vivid, scarlet light to spring into being. He wondered why he felt so sure that he would see it again and raised his left hand, staring briefly at the stone on his finger.

Even the dimness of the lemon-shaded gloom could not smother the fire in the heart of the great ruby and now little blood-red darts of flame sprang up, scintillating as his hand moved with the motions of his body. He watched the stone pulse and glow, wondering whether it possessed any real power, or whether it merely was a token of identification. Judging by what had gone before, the latter supposition probably was the correct one.

He found himself climbing a rise in the road, as though the narrow path were about to top a ridge or a knoll. Then the trees fell away with sudden swiftness and he trotted into the open, still climbing higher. He reached what appeared to be the crest and paused, staring ahead, unable, however, to vision anything that did not stand out against the skyline. The mist across the moon was deepening and the shadows were growing longer, darker.

Far ahead, on top of the peak, the crimson beacon flared suddenly into being and sent its vivid, fiery beam through the dusk. Instantly his left hand turned into what at a distance must have seemed a flaming torch, for the Eye of the Prophet on his finger was reflecting back the greater beam, ray for ray, and as the light on the peak dimmed or brightened, the ring did likewise. Now, as he had done the previous night, Larry raised his hand, as though bidding defiance to the mysterious beacon. He held his hand so that the great beams

struck the ring fairly, and they seemed literally to splinter and turn into crimson spray against the stone.

A murmur rose and swelled through the night, like banshee voices calling from beyond hidden, forgotten graves; the sound grew and swelled and he recognized them as coming from human throats. Down the slope of the ridge on which he was standing, he saw what at first glance appeared to be huddled heaps of dirty burnouses, bathed in blood; then, he saw the heaps stir and take on life; saw them rise and stand, faces toward the light on the peak. A multitude of hands lifted high and to his ears came a cry in unison, a great, rolling chant that swelled through the night and echoed across the valley, breaking with a jarring cacophony against the bluffs and the barren hills:

"*Ai*, the Great Eye of the Prophet! Mighty is the Eye, all-seeing and all-wise. We, your children, salute you and hasten to obey your summons. We, your children, are coming with food and we await your command, Mighty and all-seeing, O Eye, hail, hail, hail!"

As he continued to watch, he saw the figures stoop and pick up great bundles that had lain at their sides. These they swung across their shoulders. Larry strained his eyes and saw that the bundles were mighty bunches of dry fagots, held together with tough, fibrous vines. He imagined that fully a hundred people were below him, each with a share of the fagots.

Clear and sharp the eye on the peak held to its unwinking stare. Larry's arm was tired now from holding it high for the beams to strike the ring and he dropped his hand at his side. He did it reluctantly. It was as though he wanted to stand and hold his hand high, so that the ring would reflect the greater light, for just so long as the beacon on the peak should burn.

Those below him were moving, their faces still set toward the peak. He watched them filing off through the night with rhythmic tread and solemn mein, their huge bundles across their shoulders, their backs stooped low beneath the weight of their burdens. He waited until the last one had turned along the road and faded in the gloom, then started along the pathway, behind them, following where they led.

The eye on the peak winked out suddenly, as though a great curtain had been drawn across it; as though it were a giant search-light from which the current had suddenly been cut. Larry found himself walking through velvety blackness, for the mist over the moon was now a thick cloud, and there was no light. He followed the lead of his guides unawares, judging his course by the noise they made ahead and by an occasional glimpse of a flickering torch the burden-bearers were now carrying. He found the way was ascending once more, as though they were starting up the first long slope of a mountain.

For an hour he followed the noises ahead of him, walking slowly lest he overtake the burden bearers, which he was of no mind to do. All at once he heard a steady *tramp, tramp, tramp* of feet behind him, as of a hurrying body of marchers coming on rapidly. He stepped aside, crouching in a clump of scrub balsam to wait.

Flickering lights came into sight around a bend in the pathway and he saw many marching men, armed and grim of face, striding upward. Long black rifles gleamed in the fickle glow of myriads of torches; polished swords hung at the sides of those who advanced. Their burnouses were trimmed short and clasped close; their turbans were low and squat, of the type the hill fighters wore. He recognized these men as the men of the rifles.

Marching swiftly, but silently, they passed him, hundreds and hundreds, passing so close that he might have spat upon those who marched on the inside. Came a break in the lines, then more flickering torches, more

marching men, and now those who passed him were swarthy and long of limb, carrying heavy swords but no rifles. In their heavy, colorful sashes were revolvers with long barrels, most of them the old style single shot type. These were the men of the pistols.

Behind the men of the pistols came others, marchers who were giant, broad-shouldered men of mighty mould. Their shoulders were massive and their arms heavy and sinewy. They were long of leg and slim of girth. From the side of each of these dangled a highly burnished sabre of finely turned steel, and here and there he caught a glimpse of silver mountings. These giant Berbers were the pride of all the Atlas, the fiercest fighters of the hills, whose business it was to clean up at close quarters with their heavy, keen-edged blades. These were the mighty men of the sabre.

After these came a motley horde in nondescript attire, each bearing a goat skin that fairly bulged. They were the men of the water; theirs was the task of keeping the fighters from suffering with thirst and woe be to the water bearer who allowed his precious skin of life-giving fluid to burst or become lost. Invariably there was a flaming arc of light and a swinging, singing sword; then the unlucky man of the water went on a long visit to Moulay Edriss.

In the rear marched the long, swinging columns of ordinary soldiers, armed with every sort of weapon known to Islam, and large numbers of them carrying long, snaky lances from whose tips garish colors and bizarre flags glinted in the breeze that had not died down. Rifles, swords, sabres, pistols—all were theirs to fight with and they marched with the steady, even tread of well-disciplined fighters. Every so often a *kaid el-mia* marching with them, captaining an even hundred of them, and for every ten such *kaids* there appeared one *kaid el-raha,* or captain of a thousand.

For hours the swinging columns marched past Larry's hiding place in the scrub balsam and as he watched them moving ahead, silent save for the tread of their heavy feet, he visualized that there was under way a mighty gathering somewhere ahead, in honor of some event, or for some sinister purpose; he wondered briefly if the eye on the peak had been a signal that summoned them; if the night's performance of the red, evil light was a notice to this assembled throng, hidden somewhere in the valley, that it was time to be up and doing in some event of which he had no present knowledge. Yet, hold! In two days the celebration of the *mouloud* would be held, and with the *mouloud* some believed there was to be started a sudden, devastating movement against Spain. Could these men, these grim looking fighters, be massing to launch the attack? It seemed probable that this might be true, and if it were, then truly he was at the very seat of the start of hostilities and was, therefore, near the mysterious Temple.

After the last marcher had passed and gone ahead through the night, Larry rose and stepped from his hiding place, and followed rapidly in the wake of the advancing army of Islam. He came finally to where the roadway split and stalked along the mountain in two different directions. Up a road that led to the right, he could see far, far up the peak, crawling along with their feeble lights and heavy burdens, the fagot bearers. The soldiers had taken the road to the left. He considered swiftly, then followed the latter.

Each succeeding yard seemed to grow steeper till at last he was literally lifting himself up the trail, step by step, wondering how those ahead were able to maintain such rapid progress through the night; he wondered, too, if it might not be the part of wisdom to drop temporarily his role of wizard and make himself into a fighting man on the theory that perhaps this would get him nearer to the Temple, or perhaps actually with-

in it at a minimum of risk to his own person.

One of those ordinary incidents of military life decided him. Some marching soldier up ahead had dropped his rifle and now Larry's stumbling feet kicked against it; he picked it up and threw it across his shoulder, then paused long enough to make necessary changes in his apparel, rewinding his turban and shortening his burnouse.

Just ahead he saw the rear-most ranks of the soldiers, and a few minutes later he joined them. A burly Berber eyed him dourly, his bearded lips curling:

"Is the man of rifles a child that he leaves his companions-at-arms and joins with the soldiers?"

Instantly, playing his part, Larry's brows became forbidding in their dark scowl, and he growled:

"If the *mokhaznis* thinks so, let him drop behind with me, and let Allah decide which is the child."

Now a *khalifa,* overhearing this verbal passage, spoke up:

"Of whose men are you that you may quit your ranks at will?"

Larry thought swiftly; he knew no single soul in all this cavalcade; nor was he accoutred in the exact counterpart of any one branch of the fighters in this long line of march. Obviously, he must represent himself, while of the men of the rifles, also as of something slightly apart from them. Mentally he cursed himself for his stupidity in not having thought of his new identity a little earlier.

A thought flashed through his mind, engendered by the message of the one-eyed Youcoub el-Bachir.

"I am of no company, *khalifa,*" he answered, his tones surly. "I am of the *fraigua* of the mighty Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan."

The other's brow bent in sudden respect and he bowed slightly.

"You serve the *sheikh?* I hear he brings one, two thousand men to the Temple as his share in the Great Event. So, then, you are one of his famous Swords of the South? But I had not thought him arrived yet. Perhaps you go ahead to make ready for his coming?"

Gratefully, Larry seized on this apparently guileless opening.

"The Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan follows not far behind me, *khalifa.* As you say, I but precede him, that I may tell all men he comes and that I may make ready a place against his arrival."

Now the *khalifa* smiled grimly and his face grew dark. His next words were ominous.

"Verily, you are the greatest liar Allah ever left uncrucified, for does not every man in this *mahalla* know that he is a Sword of the South? Know, too, that the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan marches in the van? Does not every man of us know our *sheikh* scorns a bodyguard? Ha, pretender, you have left yourself in for a pretty mess. Now, by Allah, it is in my mind that you are a spy of the Marabout Group. As such it is my duty to seize you."

Larry had a sinking of the heart and realized he had stepped witlessly into a clever trap the lieutenant had laid for him. The *khalifa* turned and called to several nearby soldiers.

"Seize this impostor, for verily I believe he is either a spy of the infidels or of the holy villains who sit at the Temple. He says he is of the guard of the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan. Away with him to the *sheikh* himself and let there be a judgment."

Larry felt himself seized and held by rough hands. His rifle and sword were removed, but there was no effort made at searching beneath his burnouse. Swiftly, a command went up the line and a lane opened for Larry and his captors to move forward. It seemed to him that he was an hour or more in passing through the columns that hemmed him in on either side; but at last he was halted and bade to remain silent, while one of his captors departed hastily toward the front of the line.

Larry realized that a test was coming. If he were mistaken in the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan being in

reality Omar ben Medjad, it was likely that serious results would come; his life, probably, would be forfeit. He had little faith that the ring on his finger would save him, should the *sheikh* really be other than Omar. But if, as he firmly believed and suspected, the two were one, then, he felt, he would have little to fear.

Omar ben Medjad would find some way to save him.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GATE OF THE DAGGERS.

THE man who had gone forward to find the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan returned and spoke a low word to the *khalifa*, whereupon the latter turned to Larry.

"The *sheikh* orders you brought immediately to his presence, filthy one; look well that he knows you, else it is in my mind that the morrow's sun will see a crucifixion outside the walls of the Temple," and with the words he pointed ahead. Helplessly, his guards closing in on either side of him, Larry moved forward.

Now came another long march through the ranks of armed men, then he was halted before a group of burnoused figures beside the road, none of whom he recognized. But one of them he picked out in his mind as the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan, basing his judgment on the man's rich raiment and on his haughty bearing. He kept his eyes fixed on this one and was gratified to see the man step forward and bend a piercing gaze upon him.

Larry looked keenly for some sign that this was Omar ben Medjad, and felt his heart suddenly sink; there was no resemblance to Omar in this man whatever, save only in his stature and breadth of shoulders. He heard the other's voice.

"And so this is the fellow who says he is of the body guard of the *sheikh?* As Allah lives, he lies. He is assuredly an impostor and like as not a spy of the infidel dogs or the Marabout Group, come from the north."

Larry saw the *sheikh's* right hand rise suddenly to his neck and saw that the man was bending toward him. Close at hand a torch flickered brightly, steady of flame, now that the wind had died out. He saw the *sheikh* tug at his burnouse and saw his neck bared ever so little. He glimpsed fleetingly a tiny, livid scar on Sheikh el-Hassan's throat! He heard him speaking again:

"I look at this fellow closely, yet I find he is not one that I know. Belike he is a wanderer who has followed the Forbidden Road south, seeking the Temple. Tell me, spawn of filth, have you perchance seen a wizard along the way accompanied by a youth fair of face and of graceful form? Have you, perhaps, seen Youssef el-Habbassi, and his assistant, Allal Abdi?"

"I saw them, Sheikh el-Hassan, even as you have wondered. I saw the wizard reading the future to a holy man in a hut in a flower-filled clearing, and while he read I saw as in a dream that someone stole into the hut and intrigued the youth away, so that the wizard was sore vexed and near mad with rage and worry when he finished with the Marabout."

"And, impostor, did you also come across one who may have told you the youth Allal Abdi was taken to the Temple, that he might remain there until the wizard came seeking? Did you hear from any tongue that Allal Abdi lies beyond the Gate of the Daggers, through which none but a true believer may pass and live, awaiting the coming of the *mouloud?* Heard you these things?"

"I heard only from a passing hermit that one had given him a message to deliver to the wizard, and he asked me if I saw the wizard to repeat to him these words: 'Your road still lies south and Allal Abdi awaits in the Temple.' But, *Moulay*, who am I that a wizard of the renown of Youssef el-Habbassi should come my way? I had no chance to tell him the message I was given."

He saw the *sheikh's* eyes twinkle briefly, and knew he had played his

part correctly; knew that Omar had been striving to learn if his message had been delivered. Now, the *sheikh* turned to his waiting companions:

"This man is, indeed, an impostor, yet verily I do not believe him an unbeliever."

"Judgment, judgment, *Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan,*" a dozen voices cried.

The *sheikh* turned again to Larry and his glance was heavy with an unspoken message as he turned his eyes on the American's. It was as though he were bidding him to accept the judgment about to be pronounced. Sensing the import of the unspoken words, Larry said:

"Aye, judge me, Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan, that I may know my fate. The *Moulay* will judge me justly, and my punishment shall be accepted meekly."

There was relief in the *sheikh's* glance now. Once more he turned to his companions:

"It is in my mind that this is not a spy, but he is an impostor, therefore merits punishment. He shall, for that reason, face the daggers, and if he passes them unscathed, then will he be purged, truly will he be literally turned into a wizard and not a fighting man; if he shall pass unscourged by the long knives, then he shall be cleansed in the sight of Allah and go free. That is my judgment, and only the marabouts can change it. Take him, therefore, to the Gate of the Daggers."

A mighty shout went up and the judgment of the Sheikh el-Hassan was approved generally. Larry's quick brain caught a hidden import in the verdict; took the words of the *sheikh* as a message that he would safely pass through whatever ordeal lay ahead, and that once he had passed it, he was again to become a wizard. He wondered if he could reveal to the *sheikh,* without making it plain to the others, that he was delivering a message that he understood. He decided to chance it.

"Your judgment is just, Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan, and I vow that if I pass the judgment of the Gate of the Daggers unscathed, I shall become a wizard, for I have somewhat of cunning in the art, and have studied much along that line."

He saw the other throw a quick, warning glance at him, then raise his hand.

"It is well," said the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan. "Away with him to the Gate of the Daggers."

Somewhere, Larry heard a bagpipe skirl. At the same time the beacon on the peak sprang to life and sent its blood-red beam across the valley. Larry, looking up at it, was surprised that it seemed so near. It was almost as though it hung in the air above him. And he saw something else—something which until now had escaped his vision.

For the road had turned downward, and straight ahead, couched in a cup in the hills, was a low white wall and back of it, gleaming white and standing out like the spires and turrets of a fairy city, were the high minarets and towers of a temple! Lights gleamed about it and moving figures were on the wall.

The Temple of Doom!

Without a doubt, he had reached it, and now, as his eyes drank in the sight, he felt his heart swell in high resolve and hot purpose, for somewhere beyond these walls lay Benna, perhaps in a dungeon, awaiting his coming. Eagerly he made ready for the test of the Gate of the Daggers; warmly he welcomed it, if only it meant in the end that he would reach the side of the woman he loved—this Berber maid of the pure heart and virgin lips.

The beam of the eye on the peak sent a soft crimson flood across the white stones of the wall and the temple, giving it an ethereal touch, softening its curves and angles. He found the way was leading directly to a dark spot in the middle of the broad, low wall. He started to lift his hand, the one which held the ring, and let it reflect back that brazen beam from the sky, then felt his wrist clutched tightly, and a gentle

pressure exerted on his fingers, closing them over the stone."

He looked sidewise and saw the Sheikh el-Hassan beside him. Immediately he sensed that he was not to reveal the ring; at least, not at this time.

His captors stopped and he looked straight ahead at a gate in the wall, built of argan fir, therefore very strong, probably very thick. This it was that had formed that dark blot on the whiteness of the wall when he had first visioned it from up the mountain. He heard the *sheikh's* voice:

"Without his rifle and without his sword, the impostor will enter the gate—the Gate of the Daggers. Look ye, O Moslem, on the gate, for when it closes behind this man we either shall see him not again, or when next he greets us he will be a mighty wizard. Perhaps, if he would but say, he is Youssef el-Habbassi himself. If that be true, then his cunning will outwit the daggers, for when they close in and seek to clash against him, he will not be there, but will have leaped forward or will have dropped, so that their points will graze him perhaps, but never carve his skin. Now, patience, until the keepers of the gate are ready and open it for his admission. I have already sent a messenger ahead to apprise the marabouts that one is come to judgment."

Silently, the cavalcade stood. Larry muttered, his lips unconsciously falling into English:

"Oh, lord, why can't Omar tell me what I should do?"

Soft, sibilant, he heard a whisper at his ear—also in English:

"Dodge the daggers and contrive to resume your role of the wizard. Be guided inside the temple by whatever occurs. I shall be inside myself ere long; perhaps, if they toss you in a dungeon, I shall be your jailer tomorrow. Courage, now, for the gate opens."

It had been the *sheikh's* voice, and now Larry saw the gate before him open and a yawning chasm swing wide to receive him. He felt hands push him forward, found himself in sudden, blinding darkness; heard a crash behind him and knew that the argan fir gates had been closed. He was a prisoner in the Gate of the Daggers!

Standing quietly, he waited. He wondered if he should advance, cautiously or boldly, or if he should remain where he was. Curse it! Why was there no light? Even a dim, flickering candle would have helped.

Suddenly, his eyes were shocked by a strong light that glared directly in them and from somewhere ahead he visioned a score of lamps, with a brilliant, highly burnished reflector behind them, throwing the terrific strength of their glow directly at him. Also, he visioned something else—something that made his blood run cold on the instant!

On either side of him was a series of racks, standing as high as his shoulders, and reaching down, perhaps, to his knees. Each rack was literally pin-cushioned with daggers of all sizes, shapes and descriptions. There were long, curved Moorish knives; slender, lengthy Italian stillettos; stubby, broad-bladed American bowie's; knives that resembled abbreviated Malay *kris;* knives from India, and what not. Each rack was perhaps three feet wide, and as he watched them they seemed to weave in and out, like curtains, one set of racks advancing, while another retreated; one closing in swiftly to meet another, while others were stationary.

He watched them steadily, wondering if he should advance, sensing that if he were to be caught between two of these racks he would be pierced through and through in a hundred, aye, a thousand places, for the racks so bristled with daggers that it was impossible to estimate the number each square contained. He heard a voice sounding from what seemed a great distance:

"Who approaches the Gate of the Daggers?"

Instantly, remembering what Omar had said, he answered:

"Youssef el-Habbassi, the wizard."

"Are you a liar or an impostor, or both?" came back the voice. "The word was that a spy from the Spaniards approached."

"Is it strange that one who is so great a wizard as I could throw a spell over the rabble of the soldiery and make them believe things that were untrue?"

"What proof have you that you are Youssef el-Habbassi?"

"What proof, ask you? What, indeed, save that I have made the bugs rain upon a holy man, and breathed a spider from the air that stung him; what proof, save that I have walked the Forbidden Road and even at its end killed with my magic the Striped Death of the marabouts?"

There was silence for an instant, then the voice came again.

"If you truly are the wizard, Youssef el-Habbassi, then you have a token torn from the striped death. Show it, that I may see."

Instantly Larry's hand dipped beneath his burnouse and brought forth the ear of the tiger. Silently he raised it and held it out, full in the glare of the lights. He heard a muffled exclamation.

"Now, indeed, would it seem you are the wizard. Come, wizard, walk forward, through the Gate of the Daggers. You will need all your wizard's skill to overcome the test of the naked blades. Advance!"

Thrusting the tiger-ear beneath his burnouse, Larry left his hand under the garment and closed his fingers lovingly around the butt of his automatic. Carefully, he sized up the racks of knives, wondering if he could not simplify the entire matter by dropping on his knees, assuming a belly-crawl, and so traverse this *fondak* of death. As though his thoughts had been read, the racks now began to move, and they slithered backward and forward, up and down, covering the entire space from floor to ceiling, coming together with a clashing of blades that sent out little blood-curdling *pung-g-g-gs*. He saw that crawling would do no good.

He advanced three steps and saw the first of the racks closing in. He stopped, watching them close and clash, then as they parted he stepped boldly between them. Again he heard, as from a distance, a muffled exclamation, but whether it was of chagrin, pleasure or admiration he could not say.

Deliberately he walked ahead. He had long since reasoned that he would need only to watch one side of the passage, for when one set of racks started to move, in whatever direction they chose, those on the opposite side moved likewise, and moved later, not sooner.

So he passed the first rack, and the second, and the third. Now the fourth rack started to close in, quickly, abruptly. He made a prodigious leap and heard the blades meet with tinkling clashes behind him. He could almost vision his own blood staining their points. The fifth rack was closing in, closing high, moving swiftly. Like a flash he dropped, holding his head low. He heard the blades intermingle with their musical murmurings directly above him. As they parted he rose and stepped forward.

He wondered how many more racks there were. Surely he had passed half of them! But the sixth set of racks swooped in, swinging low, menacing. There was no time to leap forward; calmly, he placed a hand on the top of either rack as they swung in and threw his feet high. When the racks parted he knew that his burnouse, where it had dropped low and fallen between the blades, had been pierced through and through, that it was honeycombed with tiny cuts and abrasions.

But he had lost time letting himself down, so that there was no escaping the seventh rack. It closed in deadly as a fetid mist from a fever-grass swamp; he thrust his arms wide, guiding his palms between the blades, feeling them stride solid foundation. Then he straight-

ened them and braced. Now, a slow, cruel pressure came on him, and his brow broke out in cold sweat under the strain. He knew that if he gave the fraction of an inch, if either elbow bent the slightest trifle, it would mean the collapse of his arms and a swift, stinging, bloody death.

Gritting his teeth, he surged forward just enough to keep the pressure squarely on his arms. His shoulders and wrists ached under the strain; he felt that his elbows either must give way or that his wrists must break; it seemed that his arm bones were being shoved literally into their sockets at his shoulders. A shudder swept through him and he felt the muscles in his arms beginning to vibrate, as raw, tortured nerves began to cut up tantrums. He felt his muscles giving, felt even his will power being shaken, then—then the pressure eased.

Sobbingly, he dropped his arms; as in a dream he stepped forward, then, subconsciously, he realized that only one rack remained between him and freedom from this ordeal—only a three-foot square of daggers!

He gathered his muscles for a last, supreme try, then leaped—leaped high and far, straight ahead, past the racks, past a good five feet of space beyond the racks, then struck a hard-surfaced floor, and crumpled to hands and knees, panting head down, like a dog that is near mad with thirst.

"Truly, you are a mighty man; none in all Moslem could have held back the racks as you have done. Arise and walk forward. You have passed the ordeal of the Gate of the Daggers. You are now safely within the Temple."

Gasping, winking his eyes where cold perspiration had run into them, blinding him briefly, he reached his feet. With a single motion of his hands he dashed the moisture from brow and eyes, then looked around to find the speaker.

He saw a tiny, wizened man with an ancient visage standing a half-dozen yards away, his hands on a huge, many-spoked wheel. The secret of the moving racks was no longer a mystery to Larry, and he thanked whatever gods there be that it had been this wizened, thin-armed man who had turned that wheel, else, with the enormous leverage thus to be had, he would have exerted a power behind those menacing racks that Larry's arms never could have endured.

He looked at the other, naked save for a loin-cloth.

"What now?" he asked.

"We go to the Temple; come."

He followed the other down the passage, then a door swung open. He saw gray dawn breaking in a narrow court, and realized he had been in the Gate of the Daggers longer than he had thought possible. He walked into the yard as a salmon pink sliver tinged the eastern mountains. He heard the muezzin and dropped swiftly, being even ahead of his guide in that respect, something he hoped would impress itself on the other's mind, for no infidel would so quickly realize that it was time for the *fedjr*, the prayer at dawn.

Abjectly he went through this, the first of the five daily prayer ceremonies of all Islam, and when the prayer ended, rose and followed after his wizened guide. The latter turned down the courtyard, walking swiftly, and opened a small door in the Temple. He stood aside and Larry entered, his heart beating rapidly, but no longer because of the ordeal of the Gate of the Daggers, but because of the realization that he was, at last, within the Temple, the goal of his long, nerve-racking journey. Somewhere in here was Benna, his heart's very life; he would find her, and he would find the Sacred Eye.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE TEMPLE

WITH his pulses hammering and thoughts of Benna crowding all else from his mind, Larry followed his guide along a narrow, winding passage through whose gray-gloom no sunlight seemed

ever to have beamed. The passage smelled with musty odors, of decayed and forgotten things. The journey seemed endless, but at last the guide paused before a massive door, its panels of argan fir. It was heavily hinged and armored.

The keeper of the gate swung this open and bowing low motioned for Larry to enter. Stepping through the portal the American gasped at the transformation that followed, for where his lot had been cast in barren and ill-favored places, along a harrowing trail that knew not of luxury, here was evidence of wealth and not a little culture—a room that might have been made any *rajput* of India gasp with envy.

Apparently he had entered the throne room of the Seven Tribes of the Berbers, else it was the seat of power of the Marabout Group, for at one end of the wide, roomy space he saw a massive chair on a dias. By its gilt and its gold, its carvings and Islamic symbols he knew it was the chair used by the ruler of the tribes on state occasions. Luxurious hangings covered the four walls, which towered toward a crimson skylight far above. Thick rugs from Persia covered the floor, while pile after pile of rich, silken cushions were scattered with reckless abandon everywhere.

The room itself was enormous and at regular intervals were lights, and each was inclosed in a crimson box, as though some artificer had taken stained glass, skillfully morticed it into panels and built boxes large enough and strong enough to withstand the heat and smoke of the encased lights.

His guide had disappeared and alone in this eerie, goblin atmosphere, he wondered what the next move would be. He wondered if any of these hangings concealed an exit that might lead to where Benna was imprisoned; he pondered on the probable place in these forbidding walls that life would make its first appearance, and thinking thus he advanced across the wide space that separated him from the dais and paused before the massive chair that reposed there.

He jumped with sudden shock as the clamorous reverberations of a deep-tongued bell broke the silence, then getting a grip on his nerve he steadied himself and waited while the bell hammered and tolled, clanged and jangled, the sound literally smashing on his ear-drums and setting his brain a-tremble under the terrific vibrations. As suddenly as it had commenced the bell ceased its harsh clangor.

"Who is so bold that he invades, unaccompanied, the throne room of the Temple?"

A booming, rolling voice shattered the silence, but no human other than himself was in sight. He gazed curiously about him, his gaze keen, the while he endeavored to fasten on the point of origin of the voice. Now it came again.

"Speak. stranger, whom men call Youssef el-Habbassi, the wizard, and speak truly. Why do you come here?"

"It is written that history is in the making throughout the whole of Moslem, O Voice, and it is written that a wizard shall have a part in the writing."

"What do you seek in the Temple of Doom?"

Larry thought swiftly.

"Through treachery, my assistant, a youth who studied at the feet of wisdom that he might become adept in the art of black magic himself, was stolen from my side while I read the future to a holy man beside the Forbidden Road. Allah is wise and Allah is all-seeing; he has caused it to be revealed to me that my assistant is in the Temple of Doom, wherefore, O Voice, I am here to find him."

"Does the wizard speak of the youth Allal Abdi?"

"Of who else?" Larry answered, his voice sharp.

"Does he know that Allal Abdi no longer aspires to certain high powers among the tribes here in the Atlas?"

"Were I wizard and I did not know that?" Larry asked. "Was it not **I,**

with the aid of Allah, who revealed the truth of your own statement to the holy man beside the Forbidden Road?"

"Does he know that within the space of what may be measured between the rising and the setting of the sun an event is soon to occur?"

"Would I be a wizard if I did not, better than the Marabout Group itself, know what is even now in the hands of Allah? Is there any save I alone who may foretell the outcome of that of which you speak?"

There was silence for a time and Larry began to wonder if the voice had given up questioning, but just as he was deciding this must be so, he heard it again. This time there was unconcealed menace in the powerful, clarion tones that rang through the throne room.

"What future have you read, wizard? What have you seen at the end of the coming event? Where will the crisis occur? Does the future, opened to you by the power of your magic, tell you this?"

Larry smiled, for now he was on safer ground; but his smile was hidden by an arm he threw quickly across his face. Simulating great conviction and assuming an enigmatic quality of expression, he droned in a deep monotone:

"This, I see: Moslem has called her sons, her children of the Seven Tribes of the Berbers, and their allies of the north, the south and the east have responded. Moslem prepares to move, and even now makes ready. I see a day—soon—when the sun comes up blood red in the east, when holy men leave their tasks of mercy and peace to become warriors; and on this day I see all southern Moslem moving—a mighty force, a valiant army, a frenzied gathering that acts because it is inspired. I see, O Voice, this force moving through the Atlas, converging on one point, coming together in a great camp before sweeping from the hills, down toward the plains, where infidel blood is to run like a crimson river, its waves as scarlet as the spray of hell. I see the force assembled before the Temple of Doom, then I see the tents struck; now the *shorfa*, the nobles, lead their men, the *sheikhs*, the *kaids*, the *khalifas* gather their own companies and regiments. I see the Marabout Group inspiring the hosts until a white heat of fervor flames up and engulfs every living soul."

He paused, allowing his words to sink in, wondering if he were making the impression he was striving for. A hot, eager voice intoned:

"Speak on, wizard, for truly you see as one from whom the Seven Veils of Gori have been torn."

Larry resumed his harangue.

"I see the assembled hosts lining up and the march begins. But, what is this? I see, out on the plains, a fluttering of flags; I hear trumpets sounding and I see the Partisans, the Submissive Tribes and the Spanish regiments gathering. They form in line of march and they have guns—heavy guns—that shoot great balls that carry far. I see them moving, and they move toward the mountains!"

Again he paused, knowing the dramatic effect of forcing his audience to swallow its impatience. Again the clarion voice boomed:

"Make haste! You are overly long answering my question. What of the crisis? Where will it occur?"

"Nothing under Allah may move faster than Allah directs," Larry said imperturbably. "I see the armies of the Spanish and their allies, the Partisans and the Submissive Tribes, marching deep into the Atlas. They leave Ab Dukkar and they march around Duk el-Abda. They strike into the defiles of the great mountains, and I see the hosts of Moslem marching toward them. Neither knows as yet of the other's approach —but what is this? I see a bird, yet not a bird, that rises from the Spanish ranks. This bird that is not a bird turns and flies with the speed of a homing dove, back to the armies of Spain. It alights; the men it car-

ried talk with the commander of the infidels."

Now came a rustling among the hangings and four men, clad in flowing scarlet robes, their beards long and unkempt, swept across the floor. With tense faces and eager eyes they paused before Larry.

Came the clarion voice:

"Speak! What comes next?"

"I see again the hosts of Moslem. They approach a pass in the mountains, they enter it. At the other end the Spanish are entering. They, knowing the Berber armies are coming, are prepared; the hosts of the Group, unaware of the proximity of the infidel dogs, sweep forward confidently, but they are in danger, O Voice—they are faced with annihilation! The forces meet and now the birds that are not birds are soaring high above the battle, dropping death into the ranks of Moslem; the Spanish great guns are vomiting death from the ground; it goes ill with the Group."

Larry heard his visible audience draw sibilant breaths, sensed that they were considering whether to pounce upon him and throttle him or to await further word from the voice. He hastened on:

"I see a casket, with golden symbols and carven deeply. A marabout opens it and takes out—aye, I see it now—the Sacred Eye, without which no man may rule the Seven Tribes. The fighting becomes desperate; men die like flies in a sandstorm, like Chiadmas when the cholera comes. I see—but wait! What is this?"

He paused, holding his arm across his face as though he were striving to capture a vision, in reality because his racing brain was temporarily at void and he had to conjure anew. He heard the deep breathing of those who stood before him and could distinguish an impatient, smothered muttering from the hidden voice itself. On purpose he kept them waiting yet a while, although his latest idea was already formed in his mind. Then he spoke:

"I see a way to victory—I see a way to defeat the Spanish and the Partisans and their allies from the Submissive Tribes at the Pass of Death—aye, Voice, that is where the crisis will come, the Pass of Death. I have seen it revealed how Moslem may overthrow her enemies at one blow in the Pass of the Death, so that the Spanish minions will be hurled back onto the plains, utterly beaten, utterly routed."

"Speak! Speak! The way, tell us the way!" It was the voice again.

Larry dropped his head abjectly. Slowly he swung it sidewise, in a negative gesture.

"It is written that I may only speak of the way to the assembled leaders of the hosts before the start of the battle itself in the Pass of Death. I swear, by the sacred name of the Compassionate One, that at that time it shall be revealed."

"Offspring of a thousand jackals," cried the voice, angrily, "you have cheated the Gate of the Daggers, passed the Gate of the Burning; you have outwitted Beni Ahmed, and by your magic you have done to death the Striped Death of the Forbidden Road. But your magic will be as water that has already poured over the dam if you do not speak. Choose, then, speak and tell us the way, else there will be at dawn a crucifixion at the Gate of the Daggers. Choose!"

Now Larry played his hand as coolly as any poker player. Feigning resignation, he answered:

"It is written that I may only reveal the way before the assembled leaders at the start of the battle. If Allah wills, then crucify me; but the birds that are not birds and the great cannon of the Spanish will hurl Moslem back in waves of blood; I see it, and I swear it is the truth, by the Beard of the Prophet!"

Now the voice sounded again, and it was hot with anger:

"Seize him and throw him into the darkness beneath the Temple. If, before we are ready to march, he has not talked, he shall be nailed to the Gate of the Daggers."

It might be supposed that Larry,

under the circumstances, should have spoken, but he knew as much about the Moors and their superstitions and beliefs as the Moors knew themselves, therefore he was supremely confident that he could leave them in suspense until the last minute and then if necessary, obtain a promise that he would not be harmed if he spoke.

But there was another reason behind his actions. This was his desire to be made a prisoner and thrown beneath the Temple. He knew that unless the Temple of Doom was drastically unlike other centres of religious fame throughout Islam, in all likelihood there would be a great gathering of prisoners below, mingling more or less freely with one another. He hoped, therefore, that such a condition existed here, for if it did, it virtually assured him reunion with Benna, who undoubtedly was beneath the Temple, at this minute.

He felt rough hands seize him; saw the marabouts close in around him, then he was led forward around the raised dais until he was directly behind the tribal throne that rested there. He felt the arms that held him thrust him forward and he hurtled rapidly along, only his youthful agility saving him from plunging on his face. The floor opened suddenly and he was precipitated instantly and without warning into space that closed blackly around him.

Even before he had time to wonder where he would alight he struck a high, thick pile of cushions. As his eyes became used to the darkness he saw a faint crimson tinge in the air; saw figures seated and lying about.

He moved forward, stopping before one who stood, silent and sullen, his eyes fixed on the floor.

"Tell me, is there a youth, Allal Abdi, among you?"

The man nodded his head.

"*Ai*, he is with us, but at present he is with those who attend the Eye."

"And where is that?" Larry asked eagerly.

"You will learn soon enough, fool, without seeking to know in advance. Wait until the keepers of the Eye come with their long whips and their curses; wait until you feel the sting of their lashes across your back; wait until you stagger under a load of a full hundred weight and toil up a half-mile of mountain, then you will know."

"You mean," he whispered, "that we are slaves here?"

"Just that," the other answered dourly. "Now, bother me no more, or as Allah lives, I shall strike thee down. The next group that goes to attend the Sacred Eye needs must include me. I know what I shall face, having been there before these many times; therefore, I am in no mood to converse."

Larry walked on, questioning, seeking. Everywhere the information he gained was the same as that given to him by the first man he had approached. Finally, stopping a burly Moor, whose right eye was gone, he said:

"Tell me, when will those who are away attending the eye return here?"

The other looked at him quickly, then, his voice too low for the others to hear, whispered:

"I had not thought to find you here. Woe is me that I ever saw you, that I ever had converse with the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan."

Larry started and looked at the other more closely. It was Youcoub el-Bachir, his host of the previous day.

"If I am responsible for you being here, Youcoub el-Bachir," he said softly, "then I shall get you out of this, depend upon it, for I were a poor wizard, indeed, if I could not overcome walls when I can overcome tigers. I am here for a purpose," he added, knowing that if he were to admit having been captured and literally thrown in here against his will it would weaken him in the other's sight, and in the sight of all with whom Youcoub el-Bachir might speak. "I have plans. When they are ripe I shall remember you, Youcoub, and you shall not regret having known the wizard. Now, answer my question."

"They will return within the hour," the one-eyed man replied. "Tell me, why do you come here? Is the Marabout Group ready to strike? If so be, and you are fighting the Group, then there is many a goodly arm fit for battle here in this hell-hole, and all will fall in behind your leadership."

Some little hidden voice seemed to warn the American that here was a man who could be dangerous. Larry on the instant decided to be chary of speech. So he smiled mysteriously, and answered after the cryptic manner of the Orient:

"What is written is written, Youcoub el Bachir, and that which is written will be."

As the other departed Larry glanced about for the source of the dim, soft glow that permeated the place. He saw now that the long, wide, rambling room was lighted by a sort of reflection from the lights in the Temple; a subtle, clever arrangement of the torches that, shining far above, cast a portion of their blood-hue through yet other thicknesses of crimson glass onto these huddled, miserable wretches here below.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ORDEAL

LARRY, smoking a cigaret a fellow-prisoner had given him, sat on a pile of thick cushions, fuming with impatience. Youcoub el-Bachir had said that those who attended the Eye would return within the hour. That meant that when the hour was up he would see Benna. At last he heard the tramping of feet.

Around a corner which had for a background only blackness, he saw forms moving toward him, dozens of them; saw, too, that burly, bearded villains with heavy whips came with them. Once in a while these whips would sing through the air and pop viciously on nothing or descend with cruel force on the hapless and helpless shoulders of the straggling marcher who, weary from recent toil or other hardship, lagged as he walked.

He stood up and moved aside as the strange cavalcade passed him, eyeing each face as it came abreast of where he waited. And among the last he saw Benna!

The girl's burnouse had been clipped short, in keeping with those of her companions, so as to make it handier in the wearing at the toil that was meted out to those who attended the Eye. Her face held a strained, weary look and her eyes were desolate chasms of utter despair.

"Allal Abdi," he exclaimed, pushing forward. "I find you here, after all. It has been a long search, but I have my reward in meeting again a friend of my heart."

Little fires flared and smoldered in her eyes and her face lighted at sight of Larry.

He was about to speak further, but now, singing through the air like the song of a cobra's hiss, the lash of one of the keepers licked out and curled about Larry's shoulders. The sting of the thing brought quick tears to his eyes. He heard a brutal voice:

"Get back where you belong, son of many dogs, brother of swine and jackals. Allal Abdi, you have already tasted the lash this day, take heed how you act lest you——"

The sentence was never finished. His very soul shaken by the stinging lash, red, flaring rage all but blinding him on the instant, Larry leaped. It was with no Moorish trick of knife or sword that he acted, either, but good, old-fashioned American tactics; the first, belike, that had ever been seen in this region of intrigue and mystery.

Like the stroke of a piston his right fist shot out and landed on the lasher's chin. Under the impact the other straightened and tilted backwards until he stood fairly on the backs of his heels; then, like a tent whose supporting poles have been knocked from under it, he collapsed, his head lolling queerly, his face gone dead-white.

Came a rush from the darkness and a dozen men, their whips singing and curling through the air, surrounded the fallen keeper. One of them dropped quickly beside the stricken man and raised him a trifle, then uttered a startled oath—for the head of the Berber had rolled over on his shoulder much after the manner of a doll-baby's when a child has yanked it loose, save for a single, slender thread!

"The blow of the wizard has broken Emir Azi's neck," Larry heard, through the blur of red rage that seethed within him. Awed glances were cast upon him as he stood tense, fists clenched, awaiting a renewal of the hostilities; ready to fight it out with whosoever chose to pick up the gauge of the battle.

He saw the keepers ordering the body of the dead man removed, watching dully as Emir Azi, killed by that single, terrific blow from the American's fist, was borne away; waiting with a numb feeling in his brain for the concerted attack that would come, an attack that would end in his death. But none came!

Still hot with the rage that flared within him at the sting of the lash, still eager to feel the contact of his hands on the bodies of these slave drivers, Larry jeered:

"*Ai*, offspring of carrion crows, are you women and children that you fear a lone man's hands? Must I spit upon you to make you resent this assault on your fellow keeper? Belike, old women herd the swine here instead of men of the Berber blood."

He heard sibilant hisses and sharply drawn breaths; saw threatening movements among the keepers and at last one lash was raised as though to sing through the air at him. But one, who appeared to command the others, held up his hand, staying the fall of the thong. Larry heard him speak.

"It is ordained that one who is doomed to face the Ordeal may not be punished previously. Emir Azi broke the law when he struck you. He is dead, as was his due. Had not your mighty blow killed him, O wizard, he would have answered with his life in another manner. You but saved the marabouts' executioner a task."

Now the American felt tiny hands tugging at his arm and turned to see Benna beside him, looking with anxious eyes at him. He heard her speak, low-voiced, eager:

"There is a lotion of herbs that one who died in here recently left to me. It takes the sting from the lash wounds, Larry, my life's own; will you let me apply it?"

"The lash hurt my skin less than it hurt my soul, Little White Flower. I have heard something said that could only mean that you, too, have felt the lash this day, heart of my life; were it not better that the lotion be applied to your own wounds?"

"The lash bit me hours ago, Larry. The sting is gone now. *Ai*, beloved, were you not so famous among men you would attract less attention here, therefore I could kiss you. As it is——"

Her shapely little hands gestured futily.

"If we were alone, Little White Flower," he answered hoarsely, "I would devour you with the flame of love that burns high within me."

And so they talked, unable to clasp each other's hands because they were in sight of all the rabble of the prison chamber. It would be fatal to Benna for her sex to be discovered here. Both knew it, but it was Larry who, in the end, was most careful about guarding her secret.

The hour passed and another advanced apace. Absorbed in his renewed delight in Benna's presence, Larry found the time passed all too rapidly. He was brought to earth by the approach of heavy footsteps and he looked up to see bearded men, armed and sinister, at his side.

"Come; the Ordeal awaits and the Eye is impatient. Make haste, or despite the law, you will feel something keener than Emir Azi's lash."

Unable to do aught that might reveal his love and his grief at parting,

other than to look longingly into the girl's eyes, Larry rose and stood ready. He heard Benna's low whisper:

"I know not what it is, dear, brave heart, but withstand it, light of all my dreams, that you may come back to me."

He felt her light touch on his shoulder, as though she might have tapped him carelessly in farewell, then he fell in between the ranks of his guard and marched through a wide, low door, and into a passageway.

Suddenly the passage ended and he strode out into the cool night for air.

He saw that they were well up the peak. The path they were following now began to wind tortuously around the peak, spiraling the slim splinter of mountain. He heard a subdued murmuring and looking to his right visioned another path, up which toiling figures crawled, backs bent beneath heavy loads of fagots; keepers with whips were walking beside the burden bearers, allowing them never a moment's respite, driving them forward constantly with whip and with voice.

Suddenly he found himself underground again, and the way led directly up steps hewn out of the solid mountain.

After five minutes of climbing he began to count the steps. After a time, when he had counted to five hundred and was beginning to wonder where the journey would end, the cavalcade paused, while one of the advance guard knocked on a door cut in the solid rock. In a little while this opened and he found himself being urged forward again. Then he was through the door and in a room that was carved literally from the inside of the peak. It was not a large room, but two doors leading from it in opposite directions betokened that there were other rooms near at hand.

He was forced down on a pile of cushions and one of his guards stood over him with drawn sword. Larry smiled at this, his own hand touching lovingly the butt of his automatic. Also, he recalled the tiny cubes of dynamite, fused and spitted, concealed carefully beneath his burnouse.

One of the doors opened and a man in a scarlet robe, his face covered by a long mask of similar color, advanced. He paused in front of Larry and spoke, and at the sound of his voice the American started. Unless his ears had tricked him, this hooded and robed figure before him was none other than the Marabout of Adrar!

"Youssef el-Habbassi, whom men call a wizard, it has been ordained that you face the Ordeal—the test of the Prophet's Eye. If you measure up to the test, you will be freed to go and come as you will."

"For what purpose am I brought to the test?" Larry asked, keeping his voice calm.

"To determine whether you are, indeed, a wizard, as men say, or whether you are a pretender, who is come to rob the Marabout Group of a sacred thing, as we have been told. It has been said that you crave power. Only those who have passed the Ordeal safely may assume to high station among the Berbers. It has been told that since the youth Allal Abdi has renounced his right to certain of his blood heritages, you have cast longing eyes on the goal he gave up. None may achieve that goal save those who have passed the test of the Prophet's Eye and been found not wanting. We have heard that you seek to lift from us a power that would rule all the Atlas, that you might transfer it to Spain. If this be a falsehood, the Ordeal will prove it such."

"Truly, you speak as one who propounds riddles," Larry made answer. "What has the Marabout Group that a poor wizard should seek? Who dares accuse me of being other than what I have claimed? *Ai,* Scarlet One, put me to the test, indeed, that I may prove I am a wizard, the greatest who ever came into the Atlas." His hands flew from his burnouse, moving rapidly through the air. "See," he exclaimed, "I toss a pinch of dust at my feet; I rise and step across it, thus, planting my foot

where it has fallen. Now, see—a leaf that has been withered by the darkness of the Scarlet One's doubts arises where the dust fell."

As he spoke he acted his words and when his burnouse swept over the spot where he had cast a pinch of dust, a dead eucalyptus leaf was left on the ground; literally it seemed to have sprung out from the dust itself.

Scarlet Robe was impressed.

"I am but one, and I obey the edict of the majority. If it will appease your mind, I make no hesitancy in saying that I believe you. But there are those who come from afar—from as far, even, as Ab Dukkar, who say you were seen there; who say you came at the behest of the infidel dogs to wrest from the Temple of Doom the Sacred Eye and hand it over to Omar ben Medjad, a shopkeeper who is a spy of the Spaniards. But fire purges sin, cleanses of all impurities, reveals whether a man lies or no. Forward, then, to the Ordeal. If you are truly a wizard your magic will carry you through the test unscathed, even as you passed through the Gate of the Daggers. But if, as we have heard, you are only a spy and an impostor who mimics the ways of a wizard, then your false power shall not save you, for your bones will be reduced to ashes and scattered to the four winds of the heavens."

With the words the robed figure turned and walked off through the door. Larry's guards now seized him anew and thrust him forward. He went without resistance—for two reasons: He did not want to show hostility until it was actually necessary and he knew whether it would gain him anything, and he also was of a mind to see the thing through so far as possible in the hope that it would reveal to him the secret of the flaming beacon on the peak.

He found himself in a larger room. It seemed almost like an oven, for the air was hot and sultry. He sniffed and scented the pungent aroma of wood smoke—the smell of dead argan fir—and noted that a huge door, built of solid masonry and iron took up a space six feet by four in the wall across from him. Little heat waves scintillated here and he found himself being pushed forward toward it. Briefly he resisted, saying:

"I would ask but a single question, Scarlet Robe: Is the Ordeal a test by fire?"

"*Ai*, a test by fire. If you deport yourself with proper grace and exercise your magic, the fire will not hurt you, for it can harm no wizard. It may be wisdom to shed your burnouse, else the flames accidentally lick it."

But it was not of his burnouse that Larry was thinking, nor, for that matter, of his skin; rather, the thought was racing through his mind that if he were to face intense heat, pass directly through living flame, mayhap, the dynamite hidden beneath his flowing garment might explode—probably would, in fact. This, it was obvious, could not be permitted to occur. Swiftly his brain turned over the new problem confronting him and his hands, passing beneath his burnouse, came out, each holding a cube of the explosive.

Now he was in front of the door and the heat was stronger. He saw the robed figure seize a short bar of iron, insert it in a niche in the portal and pull. The door, thick and heavy, swung open, emitting a pale cloud of wood smoke. Larry gazed through the portal and an exclamation of amazement burst from his lips.

Beyond, through the door, was a pile of fagots, blazing high, while from apertures in two of the surrounding walls, attendants of the Eye leaned forward at irregular intervals and tossed fresh fagots onto the blazing pile. The other two sides were the one which faced him and the one far across from him—and the latter seemed to be a solid, living sheet of red, flaming blood!

Glancing at this closely he saw that it was a cleverly constructed window of small red stained-glass panes, set in steel frames. He saw a slender chain leading from the window

through one of the apertures to his left and realized that the secret of the Eye was now revealed: A curtain of some sort on the outside of the glass could be whisked away or replaced at will by medium of this chain. The flaring fagots inside, a tremendous heap, furnished the light that made that eerie glare that swept the countryside without.

He was a hundred feet from the flaming fagots, yet so mighty was the pile, so hot the fire that he felt the heat bite swiftly into his cheeks, like a breath out of hell itself. Heavy hands went against his shoulders and he shot forward into the fire-room. The door closed behind him with a jarring crash.

At his appearance the attendants in the apertures set up a wailing as the whips of the keepers stung them and now fresh fagots flew toward the fire.

It was a situation that he could not endure. He knew that by changing posture, shifting constantly so that first his front, then his back, faced the fagots, he might withstand the heat indefinitely, though under terrific torture; he might hold out until the keepers' lashes would cause the flames to climb so high and burn so briskly that he would simply shrivel and bake in his skin. Naturally, he had no intentions whatsoever of waiting that long.

First, partly as an experiment, he started rapidly toward one of the apertures, but before he could reach it he saw two long Berber lances, with wicked barbs, come out of the darkness and leap toward him. So were these portals guarded. He considered swiftly. He could, with his automatic, clear a way through any one of the apertures, but would that aid him in the end? He decided it would not, then his mind swept to the dynamite cubes he had held all the time in his hands.

Calmly, he struck a march and lit the fuse of one of the cubes, hurling it with deadly aim through the aperture that held the lances. The other cube he tossed directly into the heart of the flaming brands, bending low to take the rain of fire he knew would follow.

Almost as twins, the explosions came. There was a terrific upheaval among the fagots, while over at the opening in the wall there was a swift crumbling of stone and dirt. He felt burning sticks strike him, but shook them off with a quick, hurried motion.

Now another dynamite cube was in his hand. This one, lighted, he thrust at the bottom of the door through which he had entered, and ran like a frightened hare to one side, awaiting the blast. It came, and the portal was shattered on its hinges, falling inward with a crash that caused vibrations to shake the very ground.

Another piece was out and lighted. Straight through the wrecked door, in among the guards and the astounded man in the scarlet robe it flew, sputtering and hissing, to burst with a crash like the crack of doom.

Larry, his ears stunned and deafened by the infernal noises he had created, saw that he had effectually cleared the way; saw, too, that the apertures in the side walls were free now of guards and attendants of the Eye alike. Calmly, he followed his last dynamite projectile through the wrecked door and stepped into a room where four dead men lay.

Ruthlessly he stripped the hooded mask from the face of the scarlet robed form. It was the ancient, wrinkled face of the tall Marabout of Adrar that looked up at him, even as he had suspected it would be.

With none in sight save dead men, Larry acted swiftly. He stripped off his own burnouse, rolled it into a compact ball and tossed it on the remains of the fagot pile, which was again flaring brightly in the fire-room. Then he drew the robe from the dead marabout and donned it, fixing, too, the hooded mask over his own face. The changes finished, he picked up the body of the dead holy man and tossed it in a corner, covering it with the bodies of the three

guards, hoping none of them would be discovered soon.

He ignored the door that had originally let him into this place and sought another. Finding one, he threw it open and walked into another room, meagerly furnished but containing sufficient of clothing and food to indicate that the robed figure who tended the Eye probably spent most of his time here. He walked across the room to another door and pushed it open. This revealed to him a passageway—one that led downward.

"Here, in all probability, was the marabouts' road from the Temple to the Eye.

Nor was he thinking of the dead men he had left behind, nor of the wrecked and shattered fireroom and great door.

Rather, he was saying to himself: "Larry Grenfall, you've been a lucky dog so far, but you've got to go easy on that dynamite. You've only five cubes left, and God knows when you may need it again."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SACRED EYE

AT the bottom of the passageway Larry found a door, outside of which two men stood with drawn swords. At his approach they salaamed deeply and one of them threw the portal open. He stepped into a vacant outer-chamber, or sort of ante-room.

Instinctively he shrank and drooped his shoulders until, so nearly as he could judge, he was holding himself about as the dead holy man would have done. Their heights had been about the same, and Larry was confident he could mimic the other's thin, somewhat nasal voice that always croaked a little under excitement. With his courage flaming high within him he stepped across the little room and threw aside a heavy, crimson curtain that cut it off across one end.

He was now back in the tribal room, and a gathering of the Marabout Group was under way!

His approach was noticed instantly and figures stirred as he entered. Larry, casting his gaze swiftly about him, saw there were six others present besides himself, and each man was garbed in scarlet robe and hooded mask similar to those he himself was wearing. On the breast of each robe was a symbol, woven in gold thread, and each symbol differed. Something about the marks struck the American as being familiar, and he dropped his eyes until he could see the symbol that graced his own bosom. He heard a voice address him:

"We have awaited your coming, Tribe One. The Ordeal, then, is finished?"

At that "Tribe One" Larry recognized suddenly the import of the symbols—they were Islamic numerals, and they ran from one to seven. His own was number one. As he realized the meaning of the marks he had a fleeting vision of a tiny replica of a sweet musk balsam flower that he had found in Ben Mansour's chest, each of its seven petals bearing a number. They could mean only one thing—the Seven Tribes of the Berbers!

Here, then, was a marabout for each of the greater Berber tribes; each of these six men who faced him represented a tribe and all were allied in a common cause against France and civilization in Morocco! And this, without a doubt, was the infamous, red-handed Marabout Group, the Group that had forsaken its religious teachings and had turned to arms and intrigues. Evidently the dead man had been the leader for he had been Tribe One!

His voice was calm and thin, slightly nasal, a perfect imitation of the tones of the Marabout of Adrar when he answered the question that had been hurled at him:

"The Ordeal, indeed, is finished. He who was the pretender could not stand against the flames of the Prophet's Eye. His bones bleach even now,

for the fire has cooked the flesh from them."

"So may Allah deal with all infidel dogs who serve Spain and oppose the Group," said a robe bearing the symbol of Tribe Three.

Larry re-echoed the words and stepped forward, noticing as he did so that the Group stood aside, making an aisle down which he was to advance to a pile of cushions that reposed at the head of the piles the now standing men had been using as couches when he entered. His heart beating rapidly, his pulses on fire, he walked forward steadily, made aware by this act of the marabouts that the Marabout of Adrar had, indeed, been the leader of these men; therefore Larry, as the Marabout of Adrar, was now the commander or guiding force of those about him. Quietly he took his seat and the others now sat, also. Now spoke Tribe Four:

"For revealing to us the true character of the impostor, whose wizardry was artificial and not inspired of Allah, what reward shall we mete out to Youcoub el-Bachir?"

Despite himself, Larry started. Youcoub el-Bachir had, after all, been a false friend. He recalled vividly that a feeling of distrust for the fellow had swept over him in the prison chamber. It would seem now that the man had purposely passed along Omar ben Medjad's message to win for himself knowledge for the Marabout Group; and it went almost without saying of course that the one-eyed villain was now down among the Temple prisoners for that very reason —seeking to hear that which might prove of interest or value to the Group. Larry now heard the voice of Tribe Seven speaking:

"He was promised a pardon for having once been a member of the Partisan Police in Duk el-Abda, Tribe One. We should, then, see that he gets it. Moreover, it is quite probable that by now he has wormed his way into the confidence of many an evil-hearted conspirator in the prison-chamber and obtained news that we shall find need of."

"Let him have his pardon," said Larry, instantly.

Now, since he was supposed to be the leader of this group of scheming scoundrels, he decided to take another plunge, and on the instant hurled himself recklessly into the midst of a subject that was at all times uppermost in his mind.

"Give a thought to the youth Allal Abdi, Brothers of the Faith," he said. "It is in my mind that Allah in his wisdom delivered the youth into our hands, but that it is not wisdom on our part to keep the boy in the prison chamber where seditious utterances of the prisoners may stir his thoughts to work against us once more."

"How could we know your will, Tribe One? We have had your message saying you were coming, but we have not conversed with you in eight days. It was only when word came that you were at the Eye, awaiting to conduct the Ordeal, that we knew you soon would join us here."

At the words Larry permitted himself a soft, happy oath beneath his breath; if these men had not seen the real holy man in more than a week, then his own task was easier. He said:

"Does it not seem that the youth is a menace under Allah who should be guarded closely by himself? Truly, he was promised his life when he agreed to renounce his ambitions, but may he not foment strife if left to mingle with others? And now that I am here it is my mind that I would hold talk with Allal Abdi. Perhaps he could answer certain questions that I would put to him."

Now Tribe Five spoke:

"Of a surety, you may do as you will with the youth, Tribe One, but it would be well to make haste, I am bold to remind you. With tomorrow's dawn the *mouloud* will have started, and with the *mouloud* comes——" He paused, dramatically. Larry, sensing that here was an opportunity for him to send home a shot that would more surely portray him as the real Marabout of Adrar, finished:

"The move for supreme power!"

Sibilant hisses, as of breaths drawn quickly in hot anticipation, answered his words, and as a man the marabouts, save only Tribe Two, repeated:

"Supreme power!"

Larry was the only one who seemingly noticed the remissness of Tribe Two, and he looked at this one suspiciously, noting that the gleaming eyes of the man, behind his hooded mask, were fixed on him boldly, in a brazen, mocking stare! Momentarily he felt uneasy; he wondered if Tribe Two had penetrated his disguise, had recognized from carriage or voice that here was no Marabout of Adrar, but a rank impostor. He heard Tribe Five speak again:

"It is in my mind that Tribes Three, Four and myself would better start the preparations for tomorrow, Tribe One, for the people gather and the armed men await outside the gates, full ten thousand strong. They come to see the Sacred Eye and the elevation of a *sherif* at the dawning, and they are here to follow where we may lead. It is well, therefore, that the Eye be fetched and made ready."

Larry bowed his head gravely, fighting to keep his nerves steady, and waved his hand with a gentle motion:

"Let it be as Tribe Five has said," he pronounced, then turned to Tribe Six:

"And you, Tribe Six, will have the youth Allal Abdi brought here, and while you are about it see that closely guarded quarters near my own are prepared for him."

Tribe Six rose and departed, while Tribes Three, Four and Five also moved from the room. Now Tribe Seven said:

"I shall go to Youcoub el-Bachir and see that he is given his freedom to join the men outside the walls. After that I shall join you and Tribe Six here."

Larry bowed silent, assent, watching as the other left. The room was empty now, save only for himself and Tribe Two. He turned his eyes on the latter, returning stare for stare the other's brazen glances. Then a curious thing happened. Tribe Two stepped forward until he was close beside Larry and emitted a soft, low chuckle:

"By the beard of Allah, Youssef el-Habbassi, you conduct yourself like the twin brother of the Marabout of Adrar."

Larry started violently, his hand dropping to where his automatic was concealed beneath his robe; but something vaguely familiar in the other's voice and movements stayed his hand. He looked at Tribe Two meaningly. Again the latter chuckled, this time speaking more boldly:

"Truly, Ben Mansour chose well when he named you of all whom he knew to come to Morocco, Grenfall. Verily, you are a man after my own heart. Tell me, what did you with the Marabout of Adrar? Rather, with the man who has posed as the real marabout, while the holy man of Adrar, guised as Youcoub el-Bachir, has spied hither and yon to serve his own ends and the ends of this group of bloody villains."

"Omar ben Medjad," breathed Larry, incredulously, for it was difficult to understand how this mervelously versatile man had come here. Only a few hours earlier he had been the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan, commanding something like two thousand hard bitten fighting men, whom he called his Swords of the South. The American's astonishment, therefore, knew no bounds. Again Omar ben Medjad chuckled.

"Be not amazed, my friend. As a *sheikh* it was easy for me to reach Tribe Two. As a man of some strength, it was still easier for me to throttle the dog and hide his body. When the proper time comes I shall once again be the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan. Had I known you would so marvelously contrive to become Tribe One, the greatest present existing power in all the Atlas, no doubt I would have been content to remain a *sheikh* even yet. Tell me how you did it."

"I simply chucked some dynamite at the old marabout and my guards,

blew them to hell, took the holy impostor's robes and walked here. Fortunate circumstances, such as the words these bloody devils spoke when I entered, led me on the right course of procedure. But I wrecked that fireroom where they make the Prophet's-Eye," he added, reminiscently, a happy gleam in his eyes.

Omar ben Medjad became suddenly serious.

"The time when we must strike draws near. The Sacred Eye is even now being taken from its hiding place. As Tribe One of the Marabout Group, you will receive the Eye in your hands, and be charged with its keeping until the dawn and its display. Guard it as you guard your life, Grenfall, and use it in the furtherance of Spain's aims in this benighted country. I hear footsteps; belike it is Tribe Six with the girl. Think you can master yourself in her presence?"

"I did so not so many hours since," Larry returned simply, "when she came to me with the prisoners, fresh from the lash of her keepers."

He saw Omar's blazing eyes fixed on him, in sympathy and admiration.

"And you touched her not?"

"I greeted her simply as I would have greeted the youth Allal Abdi," he said.

"Then, by Allah, you love her, Grenfall; and I am glad." With this cryptic utterance Tribe Two resumed his posture on the cushions and remained silent as Tribe Six, leading Benna, approached.

The girl presented a forlorn figure indeed. Utter despair and misery were in her glorious eyes and sorrow straightened the tiny up-curls of her full, red mouth. Head drooping, she was led before Larry and Tribe Six spoke:

"Here is the youth, Tribe One, but as Allah lives he seems likely to pine away. His despair seems boundless."

"And why do you sorrow, Allal Abdi?" Larry asked.

"One whom I held dearer than all others has gone to the Ordeal," she answered.

"And why should you grieve so for one of your own sex?"

It was Tribe Two who questioned.

"Because he was my companion on the Forbidden Road; because he fought for me and would have died for me."

Now another amazing thing happened, for Tribe Two chuckled audibly and called out brazenly to Tribe Six:

"There is a friend for you, Emir Barrada."

The effect of Omar's words on Tribe Six was instantaneous. The man leaped to his feet with a hearty Moorish oath—most amazing for a holy man—and from beneath his scarlet robe he drew a long, curved knife. But Omar's ready chuckle came again and once more he called out:

"Be not violent, Emir. I see that you, also, have made your way here, even as you vowed to me that you would if I gave you lief. It is well, by Allah, it is. We are now four friends, well met. Emir, the Marabout of Adrar yonder, or Tribe One, is the friend for whom the youth Allah Abdi mourns. Youssef el-Habbassi, speak in your natural voice, that Allal's heart be not entirely broken."

"But——" Larry began.

"What——?" from Tribe Six.

"Youssef, Tribe Six is one of my most trusted *khalifas*, and he is with us heart and soul. Emir, Tribe One is the wizard."

Larry's single word had revealed him to Benna and now, overcome with the reaction, she dropped on the cushions, her shoulders shaking while convulsive sobs racked her slender, worn body. Omar ben Medjad took quick command of the situation.

"Hurry, Emir, watch the eastern portal, while I watch the entrance from the Eye. There are no others we need fear."

Now Emir Barrada was a man of understanding and a quick thinker. He did not know exactly what it was all about, but he did know that Omar ben Medjad wanted him to

make himself scarce, so as Tribe Two arose and hurried off behind the long draperies, Tribe Six took another direction and also disappeared. But before either of them was out of sight Larry, stripping back his hooded mask, was at Benna's side, lifting her to him, pouring out soft, endearing words that fell on her shell-like ears as softly as the morning dawn breaks over the mighty Atlas.

"They return with the Eye, Grenfall. Quickly, else we are ruined."

With a hurried motion Larry released Benna and drew his hooded mask down over his face once more. He was in his seat when Tribes Three and Four came up. Benna was sitting to one side now and her little Berber heart overflowing with joy.

Larry heard Tribe Six speak to Tribe Two:

"But, Omar, by Allah's beard, the youth Allal Abdi must in reality be a woman."

Whereupon he heard Tribe Two's gruff response:

"Of course, fool; would he be apt to kiss a man?"

Now from behind the draperies came Tribes Three, Four and Five. Tribe Seven was still absent on his mission with Youcoub el-Bachir, who, if Omar ben Medjad knew what he was talking about, was really the Marabout of Adrar, arch conspirator of the Marabout Group, and directing power behind the Group's deviltry. Those who came now bore a casket. Pure gold and ivory it seemed in the light of the crimson torches, and there were exquisite carvings on the lid and on the sides. It was, perhaps, ten inches square, being also about three inches deep. Sealed, there was no indication that it had been opened in a score of years—aye, in even a hundred years.

Those bearing the box walked directly to Larry and Tribe Five, who acted as spokesman, directed that it be placed on the American's knees, saying:

"There is the Eye, Tribe One. We go at once to prepare for the dawn and the *mouloud*. The tower over the Gate of the Daggers must be made ready for the display. Already the armed hosts are drawn up before the gate, sleeping on their arms, awaiting with burning hearts and eager anticipation the showing of the Eye. We shall see you, at dawn."

"At dawn," Larry repeated, gravely, and watched silently as the trio filed off. Now Tribes Two and Six arose at a signal from the former.

"That means we must join them and help in the preparations," said Omar. "We shall, at first opportunity, rejoin our comrades beyond the walls." He leaned over and spoke in a guarded voice to Larry:

"Guard the Eye sacredly. It may be that when next you see me I shall again be the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan. I would give my right arm, by Allah, I would, if the Eye were in Ab Dukkar at this moment."

Larry's fingers were running along the box, pressing the little carvings and tiny knobs that stood out all over it. Now he said:

"Wait, Omar. Perhaps the box may be opened. Let your comrade go and give an excuse for you being detained. If I can open this it is in my mind that the Eye may be delivered to Ab Dukkar without the knowledge of any save yourself and I."

His fingers went nimbly across the carvings a second time and each time as they crossed the raised places they pressed sharply. Nothing happened.

He knew the Moors were great for secret things; for mysteries and puzzles. It was in his mind that this box opened either by a secret spring or a series of them. He had by now tried almost every combination he could think of. But there remained one more. He turned to Omar:

"There are six knobs more than I can touch at one time. Here, while I press these ten, do you press the other six."

Omar bent as directed—and the lid of the box clicked gently and came away in Larry's hands!

Inside lay a golden diadem, with a single, giant jewel, a wondrous ruby, flashing from a socket at the

front. Whether it actually had a historic past, as legend said, Larry doubted, but that it held an uncanny power over all Moslem he knew to be a fact. Hastily he lifted the jeweled headpiece from the box and, without even taking time to examine it, tossed it on the instant to Omar ben Medjad.

"There," he said, "my mission is fulfilled. I was to deliver into your hands the Sacred Eye. I have done so."

CHAPTER XX.

RED RIOT

RED, flaming dawn lit the eastern sky and the walls of the Temple of Doom, white and beautiful, were tinted with a mellow, old-gold hue. On the sloping hillside that led from the Temple toward the pass into the valley, a mighty concourse of men knelt at the *fedfr*, while a group of marabouts, their scarlet robes reflecting back the blood-tint of the dawn, knelt similarly on the broad, flat surface of the tower over the Gate of the Daggers.

On a raised platform, built on the tower, there reposed an object that glinted like red gold.

Larry, kneeling with Tribes Three and Five on the platform, felt a little helpless. He had left Benna safe in the Temple, snugly ensconced in his own quarters there—rather the quarters of Tribe One, whose place he had usurped; he had seen Omar ben Medjad disappear quietly, and he knew that Tribes Four and Seven were out among the armed men of the encampment, no longer garbed in their scarlet robes, but clothed as soldiers, stirring up superstitions and fanaticisms among the fighters against the hour when the Eye should be shown.

The prayer ended and now the multitude rose—thousands and thousands of men, armed and drawn up in serried ranks that reached from the walls of the Temple nearly to the crest of the broad, sloping side of the hill. Eager voices were raised in a mighty shout. They were calling on Larry to show the Eye, calling on him in the guise of Tribe One, greatest of all the marabouts, and virtually the ruler of the Atlas at that moment to crown the new *sherif*.

He stepped forward and his hand dropped to the box, lifting it. He held it high, turning it this way and that, so that the mounting sun fell on it squarely, lighting up every knob and crevice, revealing the minute, artistic carvings in detail. The shout that had gone before was as a zephyr across a western prairie compared with the mighty din that now rose.

Gleaming swords were raised high and long-barreled rifles were shaken in the air, while slender, plumed lances were tossed like the waving of wheat in a heavy wind.

He saw one, bizarre of costume, reckless of carriage, lifted into the air by willing hands, and he noted that deep silence was falling over the assemblage. He leaned forward slightly, waiting to see what was coming. His scarlet-robed companions, beside him on the platform, stirred uneasily. He heard Tribe Five:

"It is in my mind that they desire to see the Sacred Eye itself, Tribe One. Not for a full decade has the box been opened. The Sheikh el-Hassan is a breeder of trouble. At a later date he must be punished."

A deathly stillness had settled over the concourse on the slope and the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan was lifting his hands, commanding attention. Larry fixed his eyes on the man, straining his ears to catch what Omar ben Medjad might say. He saw other faces, thousands of them, turned toward the *sheikh;* then he caught words.

"The Eye, O tribes of the Berbers; we would see the Eye. Open the case that it may be revealed to us. In the old days the Sherif Omar ben Mansour el-Masmazi did wear the Eye. Who shall wear it today?"

Larry saw Tribe Five step forward and heard the marabout's voice roar across the sea of faces:

"Why does the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan demand that which the Marabout Group is not yet ready to do? What authority has the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan to make such a demand?"

"I demand to see the Eye and to have the new *sherif* crowned because it has reached the ears of this camp that the marabouts have removed the Eye and cannot produce the *sherif* they promised; as for my authority, five thousand guns and lances and swords surround me, all of them looking upon you; two thousand brave swords are near me, all of them looking directly to the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan of the southernmost tribe for leadership. Aye, Scarlet Robes, the Swords of the South, whom I bring to the *mouloud*, demand sight of the Eye, demand the new *sherif*. I but speak for them."

Larry stepped to the edge of the platform and held up his hands. At this, the assembled ranks stirred restlessly, like the shifting waves of a sunlit sea. The American's voice boomed across the slope:

"The Marabout Group shall not attempt a decision on this issue. It is too great and it is the right of every man to speak for himself. Let those who would see the Eye and who want a *sherif* at once step to the left, where the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan commands his Swords of the South. Let those who believe in the supreme power of the Marabout Group step to the right, where Tribe Five shall speak for them."

As he voiced the words Larry's mind was racing with the thought that here might easily be a test of strength; here might come a chance to foment a rebellion within the Moorish ranks and if a preponderance of power could be swung to Omar ben Medjad's banners, then, when the case was opened and shown to be empty, might not those who still clung to the Marabout Group shift their allegiance and go over bodily to the reckless princeling from the south? He wondered and waited.

Came a shifting in the ranks. Arms gleamed in the morning sun and bodies jostled bodies as a movement in two directions got under way. Above the storm of shuffling feet and clanking arms, Larry heard Omar's voice:

"Truly, Tribe One, you are a man of wisdom. Only Allah himself could have decided with more wisdom." Larry grasped that Omar was trying to tell him that he approved of his course.

It required a half-hour for the shift to take place and when at the end of that time two great bodies of men were drawn up, with a space of fifty feet separating them, Larry calculated swiftly. Unless his eyes tricked him, the men who had stepped over to the side headed by Omar ben Medjad were slightly in a majority. His heart exulted and he faced the coming test with confidence. Now came Omar's voice again:

"The division of forces is made; judge whether a majority desires to see the Eye and to see their new *sherif*."

Larry heard Tribe Three.

"Of a surety we must open the case, Tribe One. The *sheikh* has a following that is apt to prove formidable if it is crossed. Show them the Eye, then, and have done with it. We shall do as we may about the *sherifcy*, even if it means fetching Allal Abdi. Time moves apace and the road is a long one."

Larry raised his hands again and the Eye of the Prophet on his finger sent its fiery rays across the host of armed men. His voice boomed as before:

"The will of the army has spoken. A clear majority demands sight of the Eye; it shall be shown."

Tribe Three spoke again.

"Tribe One, only you know the secret of the springs. Therefore, proceed to open it."

Larry placed his fingers on eight of the knobs, his thumbs on two others, and pressed, looking at his companion.

"Press the remaining six knobs, Tribe Three," he ordered.

The other complied instantly. Lar-

ry knew that this red-handed villain felt sure the Eye reposed in the case; that he was confident the diadem would be revealed for all to see and that, consequently, the power of the Marabout Group would be restored on the instant. Together they pressed the knobs and the little click sounded. Larry lifted his hands, the lid in them.

He heard Tribe Three gasp in horror as he gazed down into the empty interior of the case. Came the voice of Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan:

"*Ai,* Scarlet Robes; hold up the Sacred Eye that we all may see."

Now swift action started on the platform. Tribe Three, whipping out a long, gleaming knife with a curved blade, sprang toward Larry, hissing as he came:

"Trickery! I have suspected it before; now I know. You are not Tribe One," and with the words he launched a mighty stroke with the knife.

Larry had no time to draw his own knife, nor to evade the downstroke, so he moved like a flash of light and his long, swinging right arm flew out and upward, his hand clenched into a tight fist. Even as Emir Azi had felt it Tribe Three now felt the force of a powerful, crunching American uppercut and as the blow smashed home to the point of his chin, a little under it, he was lifted literally from his feet, a good six inches of daylight showing beneath them and the platform. Then he hurtled headlong from the platform, down the side, to strike with a heavy, sickening thud a good forty feet below, dead almost before he struck the hard, sunbaked earth.

A babble of sound arose among the soldiers drawn up on the slope and at the instant of Tribe Three's ill-fated attempt to kill Larry, Tribe Five also went into action, stripping back his scarlet robe and drawing forth a long Moorish sword. With this singing through the air he leaped at Larry, aiming a wide, sweeping stroke at the American's neck.

Retreating as he ducked the blow, Larry missed the point of the sword, but felt his hooded mask catch on the tip of the other's weapon and whisk from his face, so that he stood, uncovered, before Tribe Five and all the multitude. He heard a confusion of sound, out of which he gradually made sense of what they were saying:

"The wizard! He has overcome the marabouts! Woe to Moslem unless he leads us!"

He had no time to hear more, for Tribe Five was coming in again, this time with his sword held low and straight, as for a thrust that would surely plunge it through Larry's body, to stand a good foot out beyond his back. But Larry's hand was beneath his scarlet robe by now, clutching the butt of his automatic. There was no time to draw it forth, so he tilted the weapon at his hip and let it roar its blast of death beneath the robe.

He saw Tribe Five stagger toward the edge of the platform and slump; saw him toss his hands, dropping the sword, and topple. A thud told Larry that the marabout had joined the dead Tribe Three far below.

He smelled an odor of burning cloth and realized that the flames from his automatic had fired his robe. Stripping it away, he stood briefly, prepared for a quick retreat back to the Temple. He heard Omar's voice booming:

"*Ai,* let your wizardry tell us what has become of the Eye."

Other voices were roaring in an infernal din:

"Lead us!" "Who commands us now?" "Wizard——"

It was a confusion of sound that no man could make sense of.

But a fresh climax was coming. Larry knew that somewhere out among the ranks of those who had remained steadfastly loyal to the Marabout Group Tribes Four and Seven were about their business, stirring the armed men to vengeance. Now one was lifted above the heads of this group and his uplifted hands were demanding attention. He wore

a patch over one eye and his beard was tangled and matted, his burnouse a filthy rag.

It was Youcoub el-Bachir!

A hush descended and Youcoub el-Bachir began to speak. As his voice rolled forth, Larry, alone on the platform, clasped his hand tight about his automatic and prepared again for a swift backward movement that would carry him away from the tower and down into the Temple.

"There is treachery here, as Allah lives!" he heard Youcoub roaring. "Peace, while he you know as Youcoub el-Bachir, sometimes mendicant, sometimes medicine healer, speaks. I would tell a tale." As the one-eyed one saw he was receiving the full attention of all save those who huddled solely about Omar ben Medjad, he continued:

"The Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan is a traitor. The wizard is a traitor. The youth Allal Abdi, whom all men have known as the son of our old *sherif* of the past, Omar ben Mansour el-Masmazi, is a woman! It is a plot to steal the Sacred Eye and hand it over to the Spaniards. It is a trick of the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan and the wizard to destroy the power of the Marabout Group. How do I know?"

Larry saw Youcoub reach up and rip from his eye the patch that had covered it; saw him revealed as having two good eyes, and recognized him as the one who had lured him into Beni Ahmed's trap at Duk el-Abda! He heard the man shouting again:

"How do I know? I am the Voice, the Voice of the Atlas. I am the Eye, the All-Seeing Eye of the Atlas. I am Tribe One, the leader of the Mara-Group. The one you knew as the Marabout of Adrar was but a pawn in the game we play against the dogs of Spaniards. I, and I alone, am the Marabout of Adrar! I command you to listen; command you to seek out and kill those who have stolen the Sacred Eye."

Larry, taking three backward steps toward the ladder that would let him back into the Temple grounds, heard the man shouting again:

"Go, seize the wizard and slay him. He is but a treacherous spy of the infidels. Slay, too, the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan, who has appeared among us in many disguises. Brothers of the Faith, comrades under Allah—hark, while I speak; heed what I say —*the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan is known in the north as Omar ben Medjad, an agent in the employ of Spain.*"

The effect of the man's words was startling. Voices were shouting toward the newly revealed head of the Marabout Group:

"Where is the Eye? We want the Eye. Woe to Moslem if it has gone to Spain."

"The Eye has not gone to Spain. A trick of the wizard's has hidden it. I command you to disregard the trick and to march as we had planned. I promise you, as Allah lives, that the Eye will be displayed to you before a single battle occurs. Brothers of the Faith, soldiers of Moslem, *will you follow me?*"

Larry saw a fresh movement of men and arms, heard the confused sound of Omar ben Medjad's voice, but owing to the din about him he could distinguish no single word that his friend was saying. But he saw the great mass on the slope going over to the Marabout of Adrar and he had a fleeting thought that the marabout was, perhaps, a greater trickster than himself, for he had successfully pulled the wool over all their eyes on more than one occasion. Thoughts of a new *sherif* seemed to have vanished utterly.

He saw Omar ben Medjad, with his two thousand Swords of the South, falling into an isolated group on the upper reaches of the slope; saw them facing forward with rifles, lances and sabres and realized that the reckless Omar was all set for a battle, if battle there was to be. Came the faint spat of a long, Moorish rifle, and in an instant men were in mortal conflict. He saw Omar's hands waving to him, as though beckoning him

backward toward the temple. Guns exploded and sabres clashed, while the staccato rattle of pistols punctuated the din with short, barking reports.

The Marabout of Adrar had effectually pleaded his cause and had a vast majority of the armed camp with him. There was only one thing left to do, and that was to descend into the Temple and find Benna, then assume disguises for them both, sally forth and take their chances on whatever future the gods held in store for them.

As he leaped down the ladder he had a quick heartening thought that the prisoners beneath the Temple would be welcome recruits for Omar ben Medjad. He thought, too, of the Sacred Eye in Omar's hands. Briefly he thought Omar had been foolish not to reveal the Eye and thus, perhaps, sway the balance of power back to his own side. But then, he reasoned, perhaps Omar knew of a wiser plan.

The sounds of the battle still dinned in his ears as he reached the narrow court of the Temple. He knew he would meet no living soul here, nor within, save only a few eunuchs who acted as guards; nevertheless he had redonned his scarlet robe, from which he had torn the fire, and had again pulled his hooded mask across his face.

As the great doors of the Temple crashed behind him it was like entering a tomb. No sound of the conflict beyond the walls now reached his ears. Here, all was peaceful. He hastened swiftly through the tribal throne room, seeking the quarters that he had been told were his. Here he found Benna, unaware of the changed situation, reclining on a couch, awaiting his coming.

He told her of what had occurred outside. Hurriedly, he bade her don a burnouse and turban, then, seizing on others for his own use he rolled them into a compact ball, which he thrust beneath his arm. With Benna's hand clutched tightly within his own he made for the raised dais on which reposed the gilt and carven tribal throne of the Berbers.

Behind it he found the opening through which he had been precipitated the previous day, and walking around this he found a small door, which he opened, to gaze downward at narrow steps which wound into the dim vistas below. His marabout's mask covering his face and his scarlet robe wound tightly about him, still carrying his future disguise beneath his arm, he walked down the steps, Benna behind him, and an instant later found himself among the prisoners of the Temple.

CHAPTER XXI

THE REBEL HORDE

AT Larry's entrance there was a scurrying among the whispering, crouching figures and he saw the keepers, their sinister whips poised, moving about. His scarlet robe and hooded mask marked him as a marabout and the keepers made him swift obeisances.

He crossed through the chamber, its long, wide reaches gloomy in the hazy, half-light of the crimson torches above and then, back to a blank wall, Benna beside him, he raised his voice:

"Prisoners of the Temple, the *mouloud* is here, as you all know, but treachery and trickery go on outside the Temple walls. A battle is being fought between the followers of the Group and those who are faithful to one who calls himself the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan. Two or more of the Group are dead and two thousand men of the Sheikh el-Hassan, who call themselves the Swords of the South, are opposing in the fight a full eight thousand of the faithful who have flocked to the side of the Marabout of Adrar. Prisoners of the Temple, you are here for many and various offenses. If you are given your liberties, will you hold to the Marabout Group? Will you help to overcome the traitor, Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan?"

There was a fresh movement

among those who were scattered throughout the chamber and sullen mutterings, but no demonstration that might be construed as savoring of favor toward the despotic holy men was forthcoming. At this sign of ill-will toward the Marabout Group, Larry's heart swelled with hope. Turning to the keepers, he said:

"Keepers of the Eye, guards of the Eye's attendants, let ten of your number remain here and the remainder depart at once and join the forces of the marabouts. It may be that your aid will be sorely needed, for, by Allah, the *sheikh's* Swords fight bitterly."

He saw the force of keepers dividing until ten were standing in a lonely group, while the others, perhaps fifty in number, disappeared around the corner that had for a background only blackness and mystery. He raised his voice again:

"Prisoners of the Temple, how long you have suffered here in the darkness, carrying the fagots that have fed the Prophet's Eye, I know not; how long you have been enduring the biting lashes of your keepers, I may not tell, but I am here to say that the time is come for one bold stroke for freedom. I am here to give it to you."

With a swift motion he threw off his scarlet mask and ripped the crimson robe from about him. Picking up the disguise he had procured above, he made ready to don it, trusting the prisoners to take care of the guards if they displayed any symptoms of putting down the insurrection. He heard a gasp sweep over the huddled prisoners, and a heavy voice shouted:

"As Allah lives, it is the wizard, Youssef el-Habbassi!"

With one accord the keepers started forward, hands raising long whips and swords with the same movement. One of the whips flicked out and a thin, singing sword lashed through the gloom, its blade reflecting the blood-tints of the torches.

It was time for quick and drastic action and Larry, temporarily discarding his efforts toward donning his latest disguise, ripped out his automatic and sent a splaying volley among the keepers. Like wheat before a scythe the ranks of the guards thinned, broke and fled.

The prisoners, scenting that here was one who meant to give them their freedom, swept forward. Wild shouts rocked the gloomy chamber and excited voices called to him. He raised a hand to enjoin silence. He had heard previously that nearly a thousand men were held here.

"The door of the Temple stands open. I do not know, but it is in my mind that if we search we shall find arms. Upward, then, to freedom, and strike a bold blow for liberty. All of you who are opposed to the cursed system used by the Marabout Group will either strike out for the army of the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan, or will follow me where I lead."

By now he had drawn on the burnouse, a bizarre thing of garish, barred cloth, gleaming crimson and tinted-white in the gloom. He pulled the turban on his head, the curtains flapping about his neck and flowing down across his shoulders. In this garb he looked for all the world like a reckless, domineering sheikh of the Arabian deserts. Automatic in hand, he led the way upstairs and into the massive tribal throne room.

With shouts of vengeance against the Marabout Group the liberated prisoners followed Larry as, with Benna beside him, he entered the room.

Men ripped long, Moorish swords from the walls while a few found black-barreled rifles.

Plainly they were awaiting Larry's orders for the next phase of their marvelous dash for freedom. He saw a tall, saturnine-faced man standing silent hard by him and said:

"Do you take six men and search carefully, seeing if you can locate the storage place of the powder of the marabouts. When you find it, let me know. I shall await you here."

The other turned without a word,

beckoning to some of those about him, and the party immediately made off. Within the half-hour that followed he saw every man of the liberated prisoners return to the great room armed to the teeth, and by the end of that time the searching party he had sent forth returned and the leader made a quick report:

"Beneath the Gate of the Daggers is a passage. It leads back until it is almost under the throne room, thus accounting for the corner in the prison chamber beneath where no door exists. This place is the storage house for powder and shot and it is filled night unto bursting. Belike, there is enough powder there to blow the Temple clear to Allah."

"Or to hell," said Larry, sententiously, his guttural Chleuh shattering the very air with its vehemence. He raised his voice:

"*Ai*, you men who have been given your freedom by me: Outside a battle no doubt still rages, unless the Marabout of Adrar has, indeed, overcome the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan. Forward, through the gates, and join the sheikh. If we die in the conflict, it shall be as Allah wills."

As the last man vanished, taking along even the few eunuchs who had served as guards for the building, Larry turned to Benna:

"I entered here by way of the Gate of the Daggers, Little White Flower, and it is in my mind that we two, you and I, shall depart that way. Come." He led the way and after a short journey across the little court he threw open a door and stood within the Gate of the Daggers the second time. The racks filled with knives were still there, but, since no hand turned the wheel, they were motionless.

He found the entrance to the powder magazine and went down the steps. Benna was close behind him and after a time they came to a door left open, he supposed, by the party he had sent here in search of the place. Inside were kegs of powder, boxes of cartridges and a great quantity of rifles and swords. Two of the swords he chose, handing one to Benna

"Light of my dreams," he whispered, as he fixed her sword in place, "hasten to the top of the steps and make your way to the outer gate, letting down the bars that hold it. Be sure, dear heart, that the gate will open swiftly, for when I rejoin you, we will have need of much and swift running." He stooped and clasped her closely to him.

He knew that once through that outer gate and into the turmoil on the slope, where his ears now told him the battle still raged, there was no telling what might come.

He watched her as she departed, then he set about the task he had set for himself. Broaching a cask of powder, he poured a small heap of the black, gritty substance among other kegs, then scattered the remainder of the contents over the cases and packages piled high around him. A second keg was broached and he poured a tiny train from the very heart of the packed goods, out through the door, along the passageway and up the steps. At the head of these the powder gave out. He saw Benna waiting at the gate, a good forty feet distant, and he saw that the port was partly opened, that she was holding it in place firmly, using her fragile strength to keep the heavy argan fir from swinging wide. He called to her:

"When I cry out to you throw the gate wide open and run swiftly. I shall be close behind you and will overtake you ere you have gone fifty strides."

He stooped quickly and struck one of his precious matches, touching it to the powder train. He saw it spring to life with a flare and a flash, then race off with a swift, hissing sound down the steps. He cried to Benna, felt a rush of air strike him and knew the gate was open. For an instant he waited, then, like a man possessed of devils, he took to his heels.

Through the gate he dashed like a streak, glimpsing Benna a bare dozen yards ahead, running like a deer. His

long-strided pace brought him up with her swiftly and he caught her hand in his, helping her to a faster pace.

Straight ahead he saw a cloud of smoke hanging low in the air, while far up the slope he heard the sound of firing. It seemed to be dying out in the distance. Evidently Omar ben Medjad's Swords of the South, greatly outnumbered, were retreating, putting up a desperate fight as they fell back.

His eyes came back to the road they were traveling, their pace unabated, and in his mind he visualized that hissing snake of flame back beneath the Gate of the Daggers. He knew that soon it must reach the magazine. They topped a little ridge and dropped down the other side. The Temple instantly faded from sight and Larry, catching Benna about the shoulders, halted her and drew her down to the hard-packed, sun-baked earth.

Then came a roar that blasted through the air with a sound that had never been matched throughout the whole of Morocco. The air shook and the ground trembled. Crouching close, his own body protecting Benna's, he waited, wondering if the far-flung pieces might carry here to fall and, perhaps, crush the life from them both.

Followed a rain of fine particles of stone and debris, some of this striking him with cruel force; then peace descended over the valley and all was silence. Even the firing across the crest of the slope had now died out in the distance, else the roaring blast from the Temple had temporarily stilled the battle. Suddenly the firing flared up again and he saw that running figures were coming down the slope, while a great shouting and horrified cries of amazement dinned in his ears.

Carefully he stood up, climbed to the top of the little ridge that had protected them, an dlooked off to where the great Temple, proud in its white beauty, had stood. Only a massive, crumbled heap of masonry was left, the stones and pillars and minarets mingled in a conglomeration of wreckage and debris that spelled the effectual finish of this stronghold of the marabouts, this headquarters for all the treason that was bred and born in Spanish Morocco.

Now shouting, running forms were all about him and he and Benna joined in the turmoil, adding their amazed shouts to the din. None of the soldiers paid them the slightest heed, suspecting, of course, that here was merely two more of their own number. After a half-hour, in which the armed host finally realized the Temple had been wrecked, Larry heard the *neffars* sound a summons to a council and he saw Youcoub el-Bachir, the real Marabout of Adrar, preparing to address his men. He cautioned Benna to silence, then led the way to the inner ring of warriors and listened to the harangue:

"The Temple has been shattered, and may Allah vouchsafe that the wizard died in the wreckage, else may Allah wither his bones and feed them to the jackals. The Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan, whom men also know as Omar ben Medjad, a shop-keeper and spy of the Spaniards, from Ab Dukkar, is beaten with all his men, may Allah curse them for traitors. Let each *kaid*, whether of a hundred or a thousand, now assemble his men. We march on Duk el-Abda. Today, this hour, this minute, Children of the Faith, begins a great event!"

Larry heard fanatical huzzas sweep over the army, then the marabout's voice came again:

"We are about to launch a campaign of blood that will free Moslem from infidel rule. Our goal on the first move is the walled city of the mountains that I have named Duk el-Abda. Before we reach it, I swear, by the name of Allah, that the jeweled diadem shall be restored to you. Forward, then, to victory!"

Larry and Benna found themselves falling in line with those about them, then a *kaid* ordered them to fall back among the men of the sabres. Here they found they were in the company

of those armed much after the manner of themselves, either with short, heavy sabres or long Moorish swords, slender, but strong.

Over the crest of the slope, down into the valley the way led and when evening fell across the gloomy, forbidding reaches of the barren mountains, the marchers were well along the Forbidden Road, heading back along the very course that Larry and Benna had trod in their search for the Temple.

As they went forward, Larry caught with pleasure in his heart signs aplenty that Omar and his army had preceded them, for anon they came to smoking huts of holy men and hermits; tents that had been sacked and fired—all bespeaking the painstaking efforts of the Swords of the South to spread terror through the country of marabout power.

Camp was established just before the time of prayer after dark. At dawn, after the *fedjr*, there was a meager breakfast and the march was resumed. In the evening they reached the entrance to the valley. It had a desolate appearance, quite unlike what it had been when Larry had faced the Gate of the Burning, and it was clear that it recently had been the prey of flames.

"By Allah, the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan has sacked the place!" Larry heard a voice exclaim.

There was plenty to indicate that the fellow spoke truly.

Dead bodies lay everywhere and little gusts of smoke came from what had been the fortress. The place was an indescribable wreck. No windows or doors remained and every vestige of woodwork had been burned. Truly, Omar ben Medjad's men had done their work well, these Swords of the South whom he commanded.

Larry found his mind dwelling constantly on escape. He had now fulfilled his mission to the last letter. It was now clearly up to Omar and up to Spain to throttle this menace here; it was up to them to check effectually this blot of misery that was sweeping out of the hills.

But there was no escape possible—yet. A sullen suspicion was over the whole army. Men suspected neighbors in the ranks and the Marabout of Adrar seemed to suspect every man who followed him. He knew that if he and Benna should chance to be revealed in their true lights, death would be their instant portions, so it behooved them both to be careful. Stolidly, after the manner of those about them, they plodded on.

On past *el-Dholl*, the Mountains of Shadows, the way led and finally, after three days, they were at the hut of a holy man, where the Forbidden Road turned toward a pass that would see it winding on through the hills to Duk el-Abda.

If Omar ben Medjad had instantly dispatched messengers to the Spaniards after ascertaining definitely that a great gathering of armed men was under way at the Temple, then the latter by now should at least be in Duk el-Abda, if not actually well beyond it and into the mountains. Calculating hurriedly, it was in his mind that the Spaniards, if they had moved with any degree of promptitude, might already be in the northern reaches of the pass itself—perhaps they had already taken up their position there and awaited the coming of this motley horde!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PASS OF BLOOD

THE marching columns entered the long, narrow defile in the hills to the blaring accompaniment of the skirling bag-pipes and the trumpeting of the *neffars*. On either hand towering walls rose, slanting and rugged, covered for the most part with scrub argan fir, lotus trees and wild figs.

The distant humming of a powerful, gasoline-propelled motor drummed on his ears—the sound deadened by distance, yet recognizable never-

theless. His eyes lifted swiftly and he saw high above a dead gray shape, up, perhaps, three thousand feet!

Larry had no way of telling anything whatsoever of the Spanish strength, save as he knew it to probably be if one might judge from the numbers of soldiers kept in its far-flung Moroccan outposts, but it was against reason to suppose that it amounted to anything near the impressive showing the marabouts had mustered—an army that had grown, too, as it had marched by reason of the coming of allies from tribes that were not of the Berbers, but whose every thought and instinct were linked with those of the Seven Tribes.

As they entered the pass, according to the most conservative estimate he was able to make, he visualized the marabout strength at fully twelve thousand. Against these he imagined the Spanish might oppose, say, fifteen hundred, counting in the neighborhood of twelve hundred Partisans and soldiers from the Submissive Tribes. Of course, the Spaniards had cannon and airplanes, but here in the mountains where the planes would find it well nigh impossible to descend, and where it would be a task fit for Napoleon himself to handle the guns and maneuver them to advantage, it seemed to Larry that the balance was all in favor of the marching, fanatical Berbers.

Now other eyes caught sight of the airplane and a great shout went through the Moorish ranks. A voice near Larry spoke up:

"Even as men have said the wizard predicted, a bird that is no bird, and which carries men, soars aloft to menace us."

A jarring boom, muffled by distance and softened by reason of having traveled far, reached them. A thrill leaped through Larry's brain and down his spinal cord, for he had recognized the sound of a cannon!

Now came an uproar ahead and a rocking, ripping blast. A shell had reached into the Berber ranks, licking here and there as it exploded, mowing down men like the African sun might melt away an icicle.

The Berber ranks were jockeying for position and the men of the horse, the Moorish cavalry, formed from a tribe that had sent these men to them only the night before, prepared to advance. Soon the clattering beat of horses' feet on the hard earth rocked through the pass and the cavalry was off to the charge.

A terrific, nerve-deadening blast let go near by. He felt Benna hurled against him and under the impact of her body and the force of the blast of air which shot against him he went down.

That gray death above him had dropped a charge of high explosive. He felt Benna stir beside him and rose, helping her to her feet.

Looking up he saw the plane turning, preparatory to sending down another charge as it criss-crossed the Berber ranks. All eyes were fixed ahead, every energy was being strained to carry out the advance and conclude it successfully.

Larry saw suddenly the Marabout of Adrar riding back along the lines, mounted on a snow-white Barbary stallion. He heard the man's voice crying as he passed the advancing hosts:

"Treachery has been done. The Spaniards are before us. Forward, and Allah shall give us victory. In one hour the plans shall be completed for a charge with all our force. Spies report that the Spanish are very weak. We shall crush them as one crushes a serpent beneath his heel."

"The jewel!" a voice roared.

"There is no time to show it, fool!"

The marabout, after hurling this answer, continued along the lines, shouting his words over and over until all in the ranks knew the plan thoroughly

Since every man was so intent on what might lay ahead and none paid the slightest attention to what his fellow in the ranks did, Larry sensed that now, if ever, was a time to worm from the column, duck into the underbrush and get away from the

scene of carnage that would ensue in another hour or two.

Casually he and Benna walked along the edge of the undergrowth. After a time they came to a point where the growth was thicker and the trees somewhat larger, whereupon both sat down and toyed with their footgear as though to shift it to a more comfortable shape. Still, so far as either of them could judge, no one had paid them the slightest attention.

"Slide backward very gently and ease yourself into the undergrowth," he whispered to Benna. "Lie quietly there and depend upon it, I shall join you very shortly."

He watched the marching men as Benna disappeared, noting that no one seemed to have paid them any attention even yet. After a little he joined the girl, then, behind the fringing screen of the stunted trees he took her hand and they started upward.

For a long hour they toiled, then, breathless and spent, they reached the rim of the high, towering wall, a good thousand feet above the armies. A brief rest, then he led the way to an out-jutting point of rock where the scrub growth had failed to find root, and standing there they could look down on the columns of the Marabout, and far off to their left they could see the pitiful few who made up the ranks of the Spaniards.

"Look," he said to Benna, "the hour must be up. See, the Berbers prepare for the charge."

"Oh, that we could stop them," she breathed.

He heard the whir of the motor again and now two planes were in the air. One of them at that moment dropped another charge. From their perch on the rock they could see a great hole eat into the Berber ranks, could see bodies fly in a dozen directions, then the scene was shrouded in a pall of thick smoke that rose swiftly, shutting the scene from their vision.

Larry could see that the Moors were assembling in a compact mass, the returned cavalry at their head. On the spur of the moment he stripped his curtained head-gear off, then walked to the edge of the rock and looked down on those below. His voice, booming above the rattle of arms, roared down into the pass:

"Where is the jeweled diadem? Did not the Marabout of Adrar swear by the name of Allah that he would produce it before the battle? *Ai*, without it you face defeat—your ranks will be cut to pieces and your cause lost. Make the red marabout reveal to you the jewel!"

There were some who caught his voice, saw him standing with arms upraised, the ring on his finger sending out fiery red darts as it reflected the warm rays of the low-hanging sun. They set up a shout and some of the words reached his ears, but they came disjointedly. He shouted again:

"Have not men told you that I foresaw this battle? Have not men said how I read the future and foretold how Moslem and the *nasrani* would battle in the Pass? And have not they said how I refused to say how the battle would end? *Ai*, of a surety it has been told."

He heard more voices and a similarity of words reached his ears. A single question was on the lips of a thousand men:

"How will the battle end? Read us the future ere we charge!"

"*Ai*, I shall read you the future and I shall read it truly. It is written that under the Marabout Group yours is a lost cause," he made answer, striving to make his voice as solemn as was possible in view of the fact that he was forced literally to bawl his words, much as the mate of an old-time wind-jammer might have bawled orders to a wornout crew overtaken by the monsoon at its worst. "You will meet defeat because you have lost the diadem. The armies of Moslem will be dispersed ere the sun has set and you will be fleeing to your homes even as the jackal flies when fire draws near; and you will hide your heads, ashamed to look in-

to the face of your neighbor, so overwhelming will be the rout that shall come upon you."

Now he heard the Marabout of Adrar, seconded ably by those who had been Tribes Seven and Four, and by a host of lesser holy men, shouting words to offset the evil import of his own prediction. The clatter of small arms and the sharp barking of the rifles broke out afresh; the army, gone too far to turn back even in the face of predicted defeat, was closing its ranks, preparing, despite the wizard's prophecy, to make a forlorn charge on the tiny remnant that was Spain in the Atlas Morocco—that tiny, brave remnant waiting up there in the pass.

Larry's heart beat with hope, however, for he could see clearly that some of the former verve of the marabout ranks was missing; it was as though they went about their task now because there was no turning back with honor.

He heard the song of a bullet and knew some one below was shooting at him—probably one of the marabouts. He turned away from the rock and rejoined Benna. At a point somewhat farther along he found another place of vantage and, side by side, they lay on the rim of the high wall and watched the rapidly changing scenes below.

It was hard to discern clearly the position of the Spaniards, but he could see their dark blue uniforms with the dashes of red, and he could make out their gleaming rifles and a dark mass in the rear which he took to be the Partisan troops.

These latter had been known in the past to revolt in battle and turn on their Spanish comrades. If they chose to do this now, then this small handful of men who were out here to defend civilization in this farflung outpost of the world would, indeed, be in sorry straits.

Now the charge was getting ready to start. He could see the leaders lining the men, the cavalry in the van, lances poised, sabres hung by straps to ready wrists. At the rear he saw the water carriers laying aside their goat-skins and seizing the arms that had been dropped by those who had fallen under the cannon fire and from the charges dropped by the airplanes.

The airplanes droned overhead constantly now, their terrific charges blasting holes among the Moors, but coming all too infrequently to slow up preparations for the charge. When the explosive dropped and ate a hole among the men, as soon as the smoke lifted the ranks were closed and the forward movement resumed, while wounded were dragged carelessly aside, or left where they fell, to die or to recover as Allah alone might will.

The cavalry moved forward at a slow walk and behind them came the men of the lances, walking at the heels of the horses. Next came the men of the rifles, their long-barreled weapons held at ready; then came the men of the pistols, their sashes heavy with their small arms and swords. After these came the men of the sabre, giant fellows of great weight and girth, each carrying a heavy blade. Then came the common soldiers, bearing a mixture of weapons.

Now came an outburst of noise that exceeded anything that had gone before it. The Spaniards were firing every cannon they had and judging by the sound there must have been at least a half-dozen. He could see the other guns coming forward and lining up in the dark blue ranks and as they were lined up he saw men kneel behind them. His heart swelled with hope.

"Machine guns," he thrilled. "By all the gods of Moslem, what havoc they will make in the ranks of the Moors!"

Steadily the Berber cavalry moved on, setting a pace that the marching foot-soldiers were able to maintain. The way held slightly uphill, and therein the Spaniards had the advantage.

Now the larger guns of the Spaniards boomed regularly and devastatingly. A pall of smoke rose above

the courageous little band that waited so valiantly in the upper reaches of the pass. Larry could barely discern the moving figures now because of the mists of pallid smoke. As the shells flew forward, almost without the necessity of having to be aimed, so close were the attackers, they shook and shattered the advancing ranks, but each time the gaps closed up and the forward movement went on. Soon, Larry knew, the large guns would be silent and the conflict would rage, hand to hand, breast to breast, blade to blade.

Faster and faster came the beat of the horses' hoofs, faster and faster moved their twinkling legs then, with a mighty roaring shout, the riders clapped their heels against the sides of their stallions and like living streaks they shot forward on the charge, dropping the foot-soldiers behind.

Unable to maintain his quiet posture longer, Larry rose, and with Benna clinging to his hand, raced forward, to be nearer the scene of the actual battle. He heard the rifles of the Berbers sounding, caught the hoarse shouts of the cavalrymen, then through all the turmoil sounding high above other noises of the strife he caught a quick, rattling staccato of the machine guns. They were blasting a hail of death into the oncoming ranks of the cavalry, but the latter, a full seven hundred in number, were too many to be stopped suddenly by the pitifully few machine guns the Spaniards could muster there.

The force of the shock that ensued when the rushing cavalry met the bayonets of the Spaniards made a sound not unlike to that a pair of mountains might make were they to collide; then the sounds blended into an inferno no man could describe.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SWORDS OF THE SOUTH

AS the cavalry, yawning gaps in their ranks where the machine guns had eaten their way, struggled backward in a milling mass of scrambling hoofs and waving sabres, he saw the riders dividing their column, opening a lane through their middle. Now, through this lane, running to the skirling of bagpipes, the men of the lances were advancing, their long, slender spears of argan fir leveled fairly.

The ranks of undaunted Spain, still reeling under the blows of the cavalry, were reforming. Larry glimpsed supine figures in dark blue uniforms carpeting the earth about the machine guns.

The rush of the lance bearers was met as had been met the charge of the cavalry, and the men of the spears wilted before a volley of machine-gun fire that literally blasted them from the road. Dead men and dead horses formed a barrier of flesh in front of the Spanish. Unable to withstand the fire, the men of the lances fell back.

Now came a volley, regular and rolling. The men of the rifle were kneeling in the roadway, throwing their leaden pellets into the ranks of Spain and the latter were replying with rifle and machine gun. Larry glimpsed a movement behind the Spaniards and heard a roar of cheers.

The Partisan troops had at last been called to action and now they were advancing, rifles blazing, swords swinging at their sides. Straight through the lanes of machine guns, over the barrier of dead men and dead horses, and down the road they went. As they advanced, under the leadership of a slim, beardless youth who waved a gleaming sword above his head, Larry saw bayonets gleaming on the tips of their rifles.

Berber rifles, swords and lances met Partisan bayonets and bullets in the hands of the Tribesmen. Like a giant snake in its death struggles the line wavered and slithered and shifted, seemed to coil, unwind and coil again. Suddenly, havoc loomed for the Partisans. From the sides of the road came the reformed Berber cavalry and these charged directly into the unprotected flanks of the attackers.

Disconcerted, the latter broke under the unexpected assault and faltered. Their youthful leader dropped, then without any save native officers to command them, the Partisans broke in wild panic and fled, running pell-mell, without order of any kind, back toward the thin Spanish lines.

Behind them came the victorious Berber cavalry with the men of the rifle, the pistol, the sabre and the lance following closely. Before either Partisans or Spaniard could reform their lines to meet the fresh attack, the Moors were upon them.

Slowly the little Spanish force was driven back and shattered. Men now were fighting, hand to hand, a series of individual duels that ended only when one or the other combatant died. Quarter was neither given nor asked.

Fired with the victory that was now within their grasp, their earlier fears forgotten, the Berbers were madmen who, spurred on by religious fervor, forgot every tactic of even the tribal system of fighting.

One of the airplanes droned low, its machine gun drumming a literal rain of bullets downward into the Berbers. But it was of no avail.

Suddenly it seemed that the rim of the wall across from Larry had sprung into pulsing, swift-moving life. At the very edge of the gentle slope men appeared by scores, hundreds, aye, thousands—and they were pouring down the hill silently, grimly, rifles and swords ready, led by a figure in a garish, many-colored burnouse; a man who ran so swiftly that the curtains of his turban stood straight out behind him!

Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan and his Swords of the South!

Now the newcomers, apparently a full three thousand in number, reached the bottom of the wall and erupted out into the Pass. Larry saw many familiar figures among them, recognizing scores of bizarre burnouses that he had seen looted from the Temple of Doom. These, of course, were the men who had been prisoners of the Marabout Group and who burned with an all-consuming desire to be avenged upon them and upon their cohorts.

Larry led the way along the cliff, seeking a place for descent, one that would not be too rugged for Benna to negotiate with him. Soon he found one and just as he started to lead the way downward they heard the clash of the Swords of the South against the rear of the fanatical Berber ranks.

Caught at a disadvantage, the Berbers broke under the solid impact of Omar ben Medjad's forces and became a startled, fear-filled, stricken horde that milled aimlessly.

Quick to sense the change in affairs, the miserly handful of Spaniards that still lived, ran rapidly to the machine guns, manned them, and fell in with Omar's men. At once, the rattling blasts of death from these weapons shattered the air above all other sounds and the Berbers began to drop like flies under the hail of lead that poured, point-blank, into their ranks. Again they broke. Now the Partisans were reforming their decimated ranks and they added their weight to the pressure that was being exerted against the demoralized men of the Marabouts.

Larry, pausing as he saw the first wavering of the Berber ranks, watched as a fresh attack was launched, then saw the fanatical hordes break utterly, thoroughly routed, and turn to flee, making off in every direction available. Some ran straight up the road, others turned and started to scramble up the side-walls. A few, under the Marabout of Adrar, formed and tried to hold. Seeing this, Omar ben Medjad seized a rifle and calmly pumped a bullet into the Marabout of Adrar and as the man fell, dead before he struck the ground, the cause of the Moslem holy men fell with him.

The battle was won, the Berbers were routed and Morocco was saved from the dark wave of blood that had threatened to sweep across it.

Larry and Benna reached the road

as the last of the fleeing Berbers disappeared, and they were seized instantly by rough hands. Larry, looking calmly at his captors, said:

"Take me to the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan. I am Youssef el-Habbassi, whom he and all men know."

He found Omar at the head of his troops, conversing with the commander of the Spanish forces, a man who had been a sergeant, but who was now the highest ranking officer left alive. All his superior officers being dead, it now devolved on this slim, beardless lad, getting his first taste of action out here in the sun-baked hills, to assume the responsibility of getting his forces safely out of their present dilemma.

At sight of Larry and Benna, Omar's face lighted with joy and he stepped forward, clasping the American in a warm embrace.

"I had thought you dead, dear friend," Omar told him. "At the best I had expected you to be with the Berbers, and when I found you not I took it for granted that unless you had indeed been slain, then you were still alive, but a prisoner in the Berber ranks. How came you here?"

Larry explained hurriedly while the Spanish commander reassembled his forces, got men and guns into line and posted guards, preparatory to camping on the spot until the dead had been buried, wounded cared for and the most seriously injured able to be carried back to Duk el-Abda, and later to Ab Dukkar. There was no need to fear the Berbers further. The Marabout of Adrar was dead, they had been whipped thoroughly and were downhearted and hopeless.

"The recent prisoners of the marabouts tell me you blew up the Temple," Omar grinned, his white teeth gleaming above his black beard.

Larry smiled.

"It would be hard to find any semblance of a Temple in the wreck I left behind me, Omar," he said. "Now, what of yourself?"

"My tale is a short one. After the fight on the slope which, of course, could only end in my defeat, the prisoners you liberated joined me and I started the march along the Forbidden Road. Of course, you saw what I did to that *karia* near the entrance to the valley. Well, from there we moved into the hills. Ah, my friend, those armies you marched with were never long out of the sight of either myself or my spies from the *karia* all the way to the pass here."

"Why did you delay coming to the aid of the Spaniards for so long a time?"

"I had to wait until, flushed with victory, they would break their ranks and throw caution to the four winds of heaven," Omar replied gravely. "Had I immediately joined with the Spanish and their Partisan allies the outcome of the battle would have been doubtful. It is in my mind that we should still have been so heavily outnumbered that in the end the fanatics of the marabouts would have been victorious; though I had a weapon to use as a last resource if necessary. However, when I saw the Spanish lines break and the Seven Tribes overwhelm them, I knew the time had come to strike. You saw what followed. The weapon I refer to in case the battle had gone hard with us was display of the jewel calling all true followers of the Faith to rally to it."

"I am curious, Omar, to know how you held those Swords of the South, as you call them, to you through all this; how you ever mustered them in the hills and how you kept them so faithfully with you after the fight before the Temple."

Omar smiled.

"Allah's ways are inscrutable, my friend. He saw fit to have a certain word passed to a certain small, warrior-tribe far in the south that a *sherif* was to ascend the throne of the Berbers; the word said, too, that the tribe was to venture forth to the valley and that it would here meet one Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan, who would lead it forward to victorious conquest under the diadem. When I arrived in the valley, knowing the word had preceded me, of course, I

was not surprised that the tribe was waiting for the *sheikh*. Since I had myself inspired the role of the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan, naturally I assumed the character and played the part. My first act, after receiving the jewel from you and leaving the Temple, was to display it to the Swords of the South. After that, I could do with them as I willed."

"But what of the *sherif* you——?"

"You will learn of that a little later, my friend; probably one night soon in Duk el-Abda, which, I understand, the new *sherif* will choose as his ruling city."

"Then, the whole sorry, mad business is ended, Omar? The menace to Moroccan civilization is over?"

Again Omar's white teeth gleamed.

"So far as the Berber menace to Spain and Morocco generally is concerned, all is over, even as you say, my friend; but there remains still the ascension to the tribal throne of a true *sherif* of the blood."

"And when will this occur? You have said already that it will be one night soon, in Duk el-Abda, but that is rather indefinite."

"It is in my mind that it will require two weeks to make ready for the event, Grenfall. Messengers must go far and wide throughout the Atlas, summoning the *kaids*, the *khalifas*, all the nobles, to the meeting. At that time, I promise you, you shall be the first save one who is not of Moorish blood to witness the elevation of a prince to a tribal throne."

"And the ceremonies, Omar—they surely will be held in Duk el-Abda?"

"In the walled city of Duk el-Abda, where you knew me as Bou Hamara and where the one you then knew as the youth Allal Abdi saved you from the trickery of Beni Ahmed, greatest of all the marabouts' spies."

CHAPTER XXIV.

AFTERMATH

THE walled city of Duk el-Abda teemed with life. Hillsman and plainsman walked elbow to elbow through the market place; *sheikh* from the north, *kaid* from the south mingled with *khalifa* from the east and the *shorfa* of the west. There was a tenseness in the air, a harbinger of strange things about to transpire.

Swaggering men of the sabre, their heavy weapons clanking harshly, stalked about the market place; men of the rifle, lost without their long-barreled weapons, stood or sat silently. Those who moved apparently were converging on a single goal—a low, broad and deep structure that faced the southern end of the market and as they arrived at the heavy argan fir portals of the building they were stopped. After a short discourse with armed guards who stood about they were permitted to pass through the open doors and step within.

Larry Grenfall, with Benna at his side, entered the market place from their quarters in the shop of Bou Hamara, or, as they knew him best, Omar ben Medjad. For more than a week, or ever since their arrival here following the victory of the Swords of the South over the fanatical Berbers, they had been in Duk el-Abda, guests of Omar ben Medjad, who, now that there was no need, had not resumed his old role of Bou Hamara.

Benna, her eyes gleaming softly in the glow of the flickering torches that threw eerie beams across their way, strode closely beside Larry, glad of his broad shoulders which jostled rudely aside those encroaching pedestrians who, at times, seemed likely to thrust her from their paths. She was aglow with happy anticipation for, Larry had told her, this was to be their last night in Duk el-Abda. Tomorrow, the ceremonies of elevating the *sherif* finished, they were to leave for Ab Dukkar, from where they would make their way to Fez and thence to the coast. Gladly, proudly she had told him she would go with him wheresoever he might will; and in turn he had spoken of a villa across the blue, sunlit Mediterranean, in Spain or in Italy, from

where, on occasion, they could easily start a short, quick journey back here to the scenes of her nativity.

He had argued against proceeding at once to the far-off country from which he had come. He told her, rather, that after a year or two in Italy or Spain, with perhaps some side jaunts into southern France, if he saw that parting from her native land, from the country that had held all her life up to now did not cause her undue sorrow, then, and then only, might they cross the great sea to the land whence he had come.

And with that she had been supremely content.

They reached the doors of the building and were stopped by the guards. Larry recognized them as two of Omar's chief *khalifas*. At the same instant they recognized him. Bowing, they stood aside, motioning within.

"The wizard attends the ceremonies, I see," smiled one. "It was a happy day for the Seven Tribes of the Berbers, though they thought it not at the time, when you pitted your powers against the Marabout Group, for although it has been only two short weeks since the battle in the Pass, men who come in from the far mountain places bring word that the greatest peace since the days of Sherif Omar ben Mansour el-Masmazi has settled over the Atlas."

"I am glad that it is so," Larry responded g r a v e l y, in guttural Chleuh, then, Benna preceding him, he entered the building.

Almost instantly he glimpsed Omar ben Medjad, of whom he had seen but little in the last week. Omar, still in the guise of the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan, was well to the fore of the assembling throng. His eyes had been on the door and as Larry and Benna entered, he rose swiftly and hastened toward them, his white teeth gleaming in a pleased, welcoming smile.

"You are barely in time," he said, clasping each of their hands. "The ceremonies already are getting started. Come with me to the extreme front. I want you there for I shall have need of you. There shall be much revealed here this night, friend of my heart, but the fact that you are not a Moor must remain a secret; let no word or act of yours indicate you are other than what you are reputed to be, Youssef el-Habbassi."

Larry nodded gravely and he and Benna followed Omar through the assemblage. A raised dais stood at the end of the room and about this the greatest men of the Seven Tribes were standing. In the very forefront of these Omar indicated a place for the American and his companion, then he walked to the dais and stood near a giant Berber who already was there, making ready to address the throng. Now, as they listened, their hearts beating in anticipation—for Omar's promises of secrets to be revealed had stirred them both—the man on the dais began to speak:

"Men of the Seven Tribes and their allies, we are here to elevate to the tribal throne a true *sherif*. Are you all prepared to swear allegiance to him who shall ascend to power, provided he be a true prince of the blood?"

"We are prepared," came voices from all about the room.

"It is written that a great movement has come to an end in Moslem. It is written also that peace between Moslem and our friends, the Spaniards, has been decreed. The new *sherif*, therefore, shall have a peaceful reign. Only the Riffs shall continue to wage bloody warfare in the lowlands."

"Show us the new *sherif*," came the voices. "Let him speak to us."

The speaker turned to Omar ben Medjad.

"The Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan has promised us upon his honor as a Moor to produce for us a true prince of the blood, a direct descendant of the Prophet, a *sherif* who will ascend to power bearing on his head the jeweled diadem. Therefore, I bid the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan to ascend to the dais and fulfill his vow.

I descend to take my place among the Tribe of the el-Draa."

On the words the giant Berber stepped from the dais and Omar ben Medjad, smiling, and a little pale, walked into the place thus vacated. Larry fastened his gaze on Omar, waiting eagerly for what he sensed was to be a dramatic denouement. He saw Omar raise his hands; saw his lips move.

"Men of the Seven Tribes, before I fulfill my vow I wish to ask of you a question. Years ago you had a *sherif*, one Omar ben Mansour el-Masmazi. He was driven from his native country by a powerful group of scheming marabouts, who, foresaking the ways of their true calling, formed a conspiracy to seize Moslem and plunge it into a reign of bloodshed through a holy war against Spain. Men of the Tribes, now I ask you my question: *Did you love Sherif Omar ben Mansour el-Masmazi?*"

Instantly there came a roaring shout of affirmation.

"It is well," he said, "for I am going to produce for you one whom you shall love fully as much."

He reached beneath his burnouse and with a swift motion drew forth the jeweled crown, holding it high, so that the flickering lights revealed every detail of the beautiful headgear.

"Here is the diadem," he said solemnly, "symbol of power in the Atlas; wrested by unfair means from the hands of Sherif Omar ben Mansour el-Masmazi, it was held by the marabouts for a full ten years. Amid blood and fire, with toil and strife and suffering it was wrested back again from the Marabout Group by one whom you all know as Youssef el-Habbassi."

At mention of Larry, another mighty shout went over the multitude and the heavy voiced man near the door called out:

"If you can give to us a *sherif* who will be as good a man for the tribal throne as the wizard would be, we shall be satisfied."

Omar smiled now and looked keenly at Larry, then, deliberately, he turned his back on his audience. Those in the throng could see the man's hands moving near his face and Larry, leaning forward tensely, saw a slight stoop that always characterized Omar ben Medjad and the Sheikh Tahar el-Hassan suddenly disappear; saw the shoulders straighten up and become square. It was as if the man had taken on a good two inches of stature. Omar's moving hands fluttered from his face and he ripped his heavy turban from his head, then with a single, graceful motion he swung on his heels and faced the assemblage, the diadem on his head.

The throng gasped and Larry gasped; Benna gave a little shriek, then a roar such as might have come from the storm winds in the Atlas rocked the room.

Omar ben Mansour el-Masmazi, beloved *sherif* of another day, faced the people.

Ben Mansour, his friend of other years, faced Larry!

When the shouting died, the new *sherif* raised his hand.

"I am not returned from the dead, my beloved tribesmen. I have been in a far country, waiting for such time to arrive that would make it possible for me to come back to you. I had thought that my nephew might rule the Berbers, but it came to me that he was too frail, too weak to overthrow the Marabout Group. So, when I received word from the south, from my well-loved Swords of the South, that the time seemed ripe for either my nephew or myself to ascend to power, I tricked the dearest friend my brother ever had, one who is as close now to my heart as he was to my brother's, into helping me. This friend you all know as Youssef el-Habbassi."

Larry, watching, was fascinated and startled. This was not Ben Mansour. Benna was looking at the man with eyes that glistened; brimmed over with utter happiness. The assemblage, its first amazement over,

was hanging on the speaker's every word.

"Thanks to the marvelous aid of my wizard friend and to the friends here whom I felt it was safe to reveal myself to, and thanks to my beloved Swords of the South, I was able to achieve success. But, men of the Seven Tribes and our allies, I learned that the one I had thought was my nephew was, in very truth, my niece!"

Again a gasp swept over the listeners, then the speaker went on:

"Tribal law forbids that a woman rule over the warrior tribes of the Berbers, but the Marabout Group had to be overthrown and a true *sherif* of the blood placed in power. Therefor, I learned, during the heat of conflict at the Gate of the Burning in the *karia* of the valley, that I myself must ascend to rule over you, because my nephew, who was in reality my niece, could not, and there was none other left but myself, because Omar ben Mansour el-Masmazi, my twin brother, was dead. You know the fight that has been fought, but you can never guess the trickery that has been met with the wizardry of Youssef, nor can you know of the turmoil and strife that has gone before. But out of it all I am come to rule over you as my brother, your old *sherif*, would have ruled. The marabouts are gone, powerless, to revert to their natural calling. Tell me, men of the Berbers; tell me, beloved Swords of the South—*are you satisfied?*"

The roar that answered this question was greater than anything Larry had ever imagined could come from human throats. There was no doubting its meaning or its sincerity, either. Ben Mansour's brothr was here already; their beloved *sherif* here to rule them wisely and well. Aye, they were satisfied!

"Then, I choose for my ruling city Duk el-Abda. This building I shall convert into the *kasbah*. We shall have peace with Spain, therefore I shall have no need for an armed fortress; I shall need no standing army of warriors. Go with Allah, my beloved, and go in peace. I shall be here always when you need me, to settle your quarrels, adjudicate your wrongs and mete out reward or punishment, as the case may demand. I am ever at home to those who love me and I want every man of all the Tribes to feel that this is true. I have no more to say at this time. My heart is full and I think that I could be no happier."

And, so the ceremonies ended, Larry, watching the last of the tribesmen leaving the building, found Mansour at his side, one arm about Benna. He turned to the man and, tears in his eyes, clasped him close. He searched the other's face, finding that now the heavy, matted beard was gone, to be replaced by a neat, pointed one; now that the collodion that had given a twist to the eyebrows had disappeared, the man was the perfect image of the one who had died that goblin night back in the Jersey flats.

He found Mansour's brother's eyes regarding him quizzically.

"Then, Ben is dead?"

Mansour understood him and answered instantly:

"A subtle drug, my friend. The Moors you and Giles shot at were his enemies, really men from the marabouts. It was all arranged that they were to slay my brother and seize his lifeless body the minute that you and Giles disappeared. He and I always knew it was coming, how it would come, and what the result would be. People never knew there were two of us, although I sat in his throne as often as he did."

Larry dropped his head in sorrow.

Mansour went on:

"Without your wonderful aid, mine would have been well-nigh a hopeless fight. I had not thought to ascend to power, however. I had meant for you, with my aid as Omar ben Medjad to place my brother's son, Allal Abdi, on the tribal throne. I had thought never to reveal myself, but, being assured that Allal Abdi had his rightful due, I had planned to

spend the remainder of my days near him, so that I might help him and guard him; advise him and watch over him. But that night when you called out to Benna 'Little Flower' I realized that all my plans had gone for naught, so far as Allal Abdi was concerned. However, I had gone too far to draw back, for too many were waiting for me to give them the *shcrif* that I had promised them. And as I progressed, it became clearer in my mind that in the end I, myself, would have to assume tribal authority. But I had no wish to do this until the power of the treacherous Marabout Group had been broken utterly. You, dear friend, more than any other man, broke that power."

"I don't see how you can give me so much credit——" Larry was interrupted by Mansour.

"When you carried through without a fault every one of my plans, you did it, Larry; when you impressed the power of your wizardry on the people at the Gate of the Burning you did it; when you read the future to the one I then thought was the real Marabou of Adrar, you did it; and when you wrecked the fire-room, killed the striped death, and recovered the jewel, you did it; when you released the prisoners from the Temple and blew up the Temple itself—O, Larry, my brothr's dearest friend, and my dearest friend, you did so much that I cannot enumerate it all."

"Then," said Larry, regret and relief commingled in his voice, "the affair is over? Well, I am sorry in a way, yet more than my degree of sorrow is the degree of gladness that I feel."

Larry turned to Benna, taking her hand. She moved from her uncle's embrace and came instantly to Larry's side, standing close. Mansour, looking at them, smiled.

"And now," said Larry, "I shall claim my reward." He was looking deep into Benna's glorious eyes.

"I am glad," said Mansour simply, "that it is so. She will make you happy, dear friend, and you must love her dearly—always. Remember, I told you once that a Berber returned love for love. The more you love her, the more she will love you. Grow cold toward her and she will grieve her heart away. But," and he smiled quickly, softly, winking away the suggestion of tears, "I know you will never grow tired of her, Larry, never neglect her; you are not that kind. You, I know, will love her always; take her, with my blessing, and Allah bless you, too."

He turned and strode swiftly away, opening a little door in the rear wall. He stepped through this and with a quick wave of his white, slender hand, disappeared.

Larry turned again to Benna, raising his arms. She came to him and he clasped her close. Her arms went about his neck; he visioned a villa, a snowy house in a landscape of green, perhaps on the shore of a blue-blue lake; he visioned the life that was to come for him, this glorious girl, this wonderful dream-maiden, at his side, forever and forever. . . .

He felt her lips yield to his and for them time stood still.

THE END

Broadway Afternoons

—Bertrand Babcock

I do not care who writes of Broadway at night. Let him who may or she who can. I sing of the Broadway of the afternoons—of afternoons spent on Broadway, whether it snows, whether it rains, or whether the sun shines. It is the Broadway known only to the student and the lover alike of Broadway. Beneath its surface, if you have studied it as a Mississippi River pilot studies his surfaces, are human dramas, some big, some little.

PERHAPS you know Walter Wilson. I met him again the other afternoon on Broadway. He had just finished staging the comedy scenes of a revue which will establish his class as a stage director. I have known Walter Wilson for years. We were together in the west once with a play that drew no other favorable comment from the Chicago critics than the Smart Alec epigram that the "leading lady wore a hat that had been purchased on the wrong side of State Street."

I have always found Walter Wilson quiet, efficient, helpful to others, unselfish, living when he is in town in the upper part of the city on an old landed estate with his mother and sister. He has been starred and restarred. He has written and reconstructed plays and is the author of many informative articles on the theatre, stage management and direction, color values, casting, lighting.

It is a theory of mine that every man and woman has lived a story, real vivid, dramatic or farcical, comic or tragic. And always there is a romance.

So meeting Walter Wilson I deliberately went out getting his story. We went into the Astor Grill and got a table well away from Broadway's too eager ears. As Wilson sat opposite me I felt the quiet force of the man. He was not unhappy. There was an air about him—an emination from his personality of a happy sadness. He was a man complete in himself, but a man with a secret which remained a secret only because the casual did not sense it.

"Tell me, Walter," I asked, "why you have never married?"

My acquaintance goes back with him ten years and during that time I had never known him to be other than distantly and politely friendly with any woman.

"I have been married," he said. "It was twenty years ago. She has been dead ten years as the world would say, but she is just as vividly with me as she was ten years ago. It is as though after you and I have finished our talk I were going home to her or she was to meet me upstairs in Peacock Alley."

He smiled. It was not as one who is sad, but only as one who is happy —but happy with a grave joy.

"That is wonderful sentiment on Broadway," I urged. "You ought to tell me the story. Every fine thing carries with it, inherent in it, its great influence for good—for the thing it itself is."

"That is true," he said thoughtfully, still with that sadness which was not without its quiet joy—or that joy which was not stripped of gravity.

Then after a moment while he looked straight ahead of him:

"It was twenty years ago that a manager decided to star me in a tour of the country in a character part. The play was 'The Child of the Regiment.' The company had been rehearsing without me and I was to open in Paterson. It was a beautiful day with sunshine and a promise of early summer in the air, though it was winter when I arrived at the theatre in Paterson. The company was partly in the theatre and partly outside waiting for me when I got there. Outside the theatre sitting on a little iron balcony of the fire-escape —prosaic fire-escape it was, but it seemed always after that like a Romeo and Juliet balcony—was a little girl. I cannot describe her except to say that she was the tiniest, loveliest little girl in the world. I looked at her and smiled and went into the theatre. Just a moment before she had been climbing about the fire-escape like a little boy, laughing roguishly with another little girl of the company.

"I went inside the theatre and took the manuscript of the play to hear the company read their lines. The little girl was in the first scene and she came forward. I looked at her. It seemed to me as if something almost visible as a flash of electricity passed from her to me—I felt a strange confusion—something unknown to me up to that time—and the manuscript dropped to the floor of the stage from my trembling fingers.

"I laughed like any bashful country youngster at the old school spelling bee and picked up the manuscript. I suppose we got through that rehearsal and that eventually I played my own scenes after I had rehearsed the company in several in which I had no part—I suppose so but I cannot tell you anything about it. I simply do not remember.

"We opened and played Paterson and began to go further south. At the end of a few days I realized that I was madly in love. The little girl was Pearl Havlin, a niece of John Havlin of Stair & Havlin, owners at that time of a large circuit of theatres.

"Then something happened. I came off from one of my scenes and stood in an entrance where the little girl was waiting to make her own entrance.

"Then I said something without knowing that I said it and without any conscious impelling upon my part.

"What I said was of the theatre theatrical and showed the thought and influence of the theatre, but it was real, too.

"I said:

" 'Will you marry me week after next in Nashville, Tennessee?"

"I knew the bookings and knew that we would be in Nashville in two weeks.

"The little girl looked at me and said:

" 'Why, Walter, I won't be able to play my scene if you say anything more now.'

'But after the performance that night we talked it over.

"The little girl said that she never had thought of such a thing; that she hadn't really considered marriage at all; that she had always wanted to have a career; and that she would have to think it over for some time. But I didn't entirely lose heart, for, like the child she was, she asked, not demurely, as a sly little girl would, but really seriously:

" 'Don't you think that New Orleans would be better than Nashville, Walter?'

" 'Nashville,' I said, 'is one of the

finest and greatest cities in the entire United States'—and then I became almost hysterical in my happiness—'Its population is the second largest in——' and then I had to stop. I was too happy even for hysterical gaiety.

"Well, the week after that we played Pittsburgh. The manager of the company was married and he saw how things were with us. His wife was with him and he invited us to take dinner with him and his wife at an old hotel in Pittsburgh. We went. We ate the soup, the olives and the celery, but after that we ate nothing and stared into one another's faces. The manager and his wife tried to carry on a conversation with us for a time, but finally they saw what had happened and they ate in silence. We said never a word but held hands under the table and ate an olive once in a while.

"Well, Nashville did prove to be one of the finest cities in the United States, indeed, in the whole world. We were married there. That was twenty years ago. For the next ten years we were always together. Sometimes the little girl played roles and sometimes she did not. Finally during the last of these ten years of love and romance she played no parts. She had always a lesion of the heart. She was very delicate, but she insisted always upon traveling with me. During the last year of our life together I was leading man with Mrs. Fiske in 'Erstwhile Susan.' That was ten years ago. At the end of my engagement in that, during the summer, the little girl passed away.

"That was ten years ago. She is just as present with me now as though she were in the next room. I shall never marry again of course. It seems actual sacrilege even to say that.

"For the past ten years I have been alone, but I have not been alone. I have been happy. I have staged plays, written them, rewritten them and acted in them, but always there is a sense of her being with me. She has not died.

"All of these past ten years I have worked alone, but happily and contentedly. Each day I think of some little thing that she said or did in her tender little girl way and it seems to me that she had just done or said it. I am not alone and as long as I live I shall never be alone.

"So, you see, I go contentedly through life, for the worst that could happen has happened and the best that could happen has happened.

"That is the essence of a complete life and that has been my life—that is my life."

I wrote above . . . I am well aware that I could sound a different note and make you feel that my treatment of the story of Walter Wilson was finished, but I prefer to end it merely with . . . and end it upon the broken note that it is.

That is life, always this . . . always the broken note.

Yes, life is the broken note, the grotesque sometimes.

One afternoon on Broadway I met a man whose name I will not write here.

"You do not remember me, Mr. Babcock?" he said. "You helped my wife when it was thought that she had tried to kill herself. You remember —— You saw her first backstage when she rushed up to you and asked you to protect her from a crowd of reporters. You asked her what was the matter and she told you that there was a story in the papers that she had tried to poison herself. She said that reporters were outside trying to get the story from her. She told you that she had taken poison by mistake. You didn't ask her anything about the reason, but you got rid of the reporters. Then she told you that she had been to a hospital. You weren't satisfied with that, but you got a big medical man on the phone and he told you the treatment. It was the same that her own doctor was giving her, but that didn't matter. She was sure that she would be all right."

"Yes, I remember the occurrence," I told him. "She said something about a quarrel with her fiance. I don't remember what it was. Were you the fiance?"

"I am her husband," he said, "and I was her fiance then." And then came the story:

It seems that the young man whom I met on Broadway for the first time that afternoon (his wife had pointed me out to him) had been engaged to the girl. An elderly man was also paying her attention. When the young man learned that this older man already had a wife and several children, he went to him.

"You mean that girl no good," he said. "I love her, respect her and mean to marry her. If you do not leave her alone I will kill you."

And he meant it.

Naturally the young woman did not relish this conversation. She objected very vigorously.

"I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself," she told him, "and I mean to do so without any interference or help from you. You simply do not trust me. You say that you love me, but you do not trust me."

He protested the entire sincerity of his intentions and attitude.

"You go away from me and you stay away," the girl decided. "I thought that I loved you but I care nothing for you. I despise you. You are a mean man. Go away."

The sensitive young fellow obeyed the girl.

"All right, I will," he told her. "You will soon find out the difference."

The elderly man learning of the quarrel, and thinking that it was largely for his benefit, offered a present or so. Christmas came and he offered a fur coat and a diamond bracelet. The girl became hysterical and flung coat and bracelet into his face.

"You think that I am that sort of a thing," she told him. "I merely saw you at all because I wanted to get even with him."

"With him? Who? What him?"

"The only him there ever was," the girl retorted.

And then she was alone. Confusion came into her mind. She was taken to a hospital and treated.

But the despised reporters had written a story which was printed. It told of an accidental poisoning and the newspapers were trying to get the story of the cause.

"I read that story," the young man told me on Broadway. "And you can bet that I got to her just as quickly as I could. She flung herself into my arms. We were married. We were married long before the doctors declared her out of danger. She said that if she died she wanted to die my wife. She knew that I loved her. She loved me and she said that I had been entirely right.

"But she didn't die. I knew that it would be very hard for her to settle down as married women are supposed to do—or were before the present age. So I took her into my business. She seemed contented and happy."

Very conventional, you say? Where is the . . . and where the broken note, where the grotesque twist?

Wait! WAIT!

The young man has one of the best positions on Broadway and he could easily employ his wife to the entire advantage of the business.

"So now you are two of the happiest people on earth?" I said.

"We were, but we are two of the most miserable now."

"Go on."

"You see for a time we were very happy. She worked close to me. We went out to luncheon together and every evening she got off a little early and went uptown to our home to cook the dinner.

"But the people with whom our concern does business were always giving me tickets for musical shows. When I was courting my wife and she was in the musical shows I never had time to go to any except those she was in. So I wanted to take advan-

tage of all of those free tickets. And I wanted to take her with me.

"But she wouldn't go. She said that she had had enough of theatres to last her all her life. She never wanted to see the inside of one in her life again.

" 'Dear, can't you be content to stay at home with me,' she said always. 'I will cook you such a fine dinner. And then we will read some book together or if you like even a magazine.'

"But I didn't want to stay at home. And I told her so.

" 'You don't love me any more,' she kept saying. 'If you did you would be content to be with me.'

"But I wanted to go to musical shows and so I went with another fellow.

"Then after a time she would complain that I was staying away from her and that I must be interested in somebody else.

"But of course I wasn't.

"The upshot of the whole matter is that we are working in my business, but we aren't speaking. She is alone in our flat and I have taken a room downtown near the business. We don't go to luncheon together any more. We are not on speaking terms."

The . . . ? The broken note? The grotesque note?

WAIT!

It was a few afternoons later. I dropped into the place of business which employs this young man. It is fairly a public place. I saw both the man and the girl. I spoke a few words to each as I encountered them. And all the while I thought how futile existence is. Here was a young man who had truly loved. He had left the woman he loved when he thought it was for her own good, in the episode of the elderly present bearer. Had he been a weaker man he would not have been able to do so. And then like a real man he had come to her aid in her poisoned hour.

Yet here he was fighting another battle, and keeping away from the woman he truly loved.

"How does she look?" he asked eagerly. "Do you think she will give in? Do you think that she will learn to try and make matters agreeable to both of us?"

"I don't know," I said. "But I do know one thing. She is entirely right and you are wrong. You have got to learn that marriage, like any other partnership, is a matter of compromise. Why, two men sharing the same apartment cannot live together without friction. They both have to compromise. How on earth can you expect a man and a woman to have any better luck?"

But when I had talked with her I had said:

"You were entirely wrong," and had told her that life, and especially marriage, was a compromise.

"How does he look? Will he give in?" she asked.

"He will not give in because he was entirely right," I told her. "I can understand just how it all came about."

And then I went out of the place.

I decided that I would leave them to compromise and think matters over. So I did not go near that place of business for some afternoons. Finally I did so. I encountered the husband first and a little distance off I saw the wife. The husband greeted me sheepishly, just as a man does after he feels that he has been too confidential.

"How are you?" he asked.

"Very well."

"It's a wonderful day we are having."

"Isn't it?"

"It doesn't look too much like rain."

I smiled rather grimly.

"No, but it does look a little like applesauce," I said sarcastically. "Come on like a man and take your medicine. How about it?"

"Well, everything is all right." He grinned nervously. "We compromised. We stay home three nights a week and go to the theatre or out the other week-day evenings."

"I'd advise you to toss a coin to see what to do on Sundays," I told him, but I was glad because that pair truly love one another and by everything they deserve some happiness.

And a little later the wife passed me and gave me a distant cold little nod.

And that again is life—very much so.

Now I like that little pair. I regard them as some of my Broadway children. Every once in a while I just go into the public place which is also their place of business and stand around long enough to see if they are on speaking terms. But when I greet them they just nod, say something about the weather and hurry off on some pretended errand or to speak to some purely mythical person in the distance.

Which is exactly as it should be because there must be some reserves in life. Emotion, catastrophe break down these barriers—these reserves. When each of them separately becomes friendly with me again I shall know that my services are needed.

As I strolled along on my Broadway this afternoon I stopped and bought a newspaper from a gloomy newsman on a corner with a little stand. I did not want the paper, but I knew that that newsman had reason for being gloomy. He could not be gloomy on Broadway without reason —some reason.

We talked. He was unshaved, with white hair on his head and the bristles on his face were white also. He afterward told me that he was 48.

"Can you tell me how to get my naturalization papers?" he asked.

And then after a time he told me that he had not seen his family, a wife and several children, in eight years. He had been a railroad conductor in Russia in the old regime. But he had come here to make his fortune and bring his wife and family.

"For eight years I have been here," he said, "doing a little business like this, but I cannot make enough money. I cannot get to be a conductor on a railroad here. I do not belong to the union and I cannot join it. I have not the money and I do not know how to join it or to get the money. So I sell papers. I have been here eight years. And my family has been there for eight years near Moscow. Sometimes I send them some money when I have it. How am I to see them? Will I ever see them? I was a soldier in the war and I did not see them then. And now I do not see them."

And then again he fell into his gloom. But every day I buy some of his papers and magazines and when I stop he salutes me and I salute him.

Gloomy man, when? I wonder.

And who and what can apply the remedy to such a situation?

Again there is the . . . the broken note.

And on that note we end.

Broadway in the afternoon! That's the real, the human Broadway!

Broadway at night? That's for tourists!

Leaves From My Broadway Note Book

Kenneth McKenna in "What Every Woman" knows has an odd habit. He owns a police dog which, strange for that breed, is gentle. The dog remains in his dressing-room even on first nights and is Mr. McKenna's mascot.

* * *

Dorothy Wegman was a Washington Irving High School girl. And every once in a while she goes back there just to see the school and probably every girl in that "high" asks her how to get on the stage.

* * *

Rae Dowling is the wife of the comedian and singer. Eddie Dowling. She frequently makes up as a baby in

comedy scenes and she is called on to scream just as a baby does. Her scream is very natural—just like a baby. She says that she owes it to her husband, Mr. Dowling, because he taught her to sing her scream, just as a singer does. So she does not tear her throat to pieces.

* * *

Milano Tilden is the third of his race to bear that name. His father was an artist abroad and a relative of the great Samuel Tilden. And his grandfather was Milano Tilden also. Oh, yes, there is a fourth Milano. It is the son of Milano Tilden, the actor in "The Great God Brown."

* * *

John Van Lowe, now in the "Vanities," has dropped the "John" and is now billed exclusively as Van Lowe. I like the idea. I never did like "Johns," anyway. Van Lowe is a very successful eccentric dancer as well as comedian and lately he has taken to staging dancing shows.

* * *

There is a girl in that same "Vanities" who has the name "Ripples Covert." Isn't that a wonderful name for a stage name? Doesn't it suggest shady nooks, wooded glens, secrecy and all the other elements of a traditional stage plot? "Ripples Covert!" I hope she lives to make that name better known. It deserves to be!

* * *

Rosalie Stewart has a manager named Charles Stewart, a well-known theatrical man. But they're not related.

* * *

James Barton has a large power yacht which he keeps in the vicinity of New York waters and upon which he sleeps every night when he is playing in New York in yachting months.

Lincoln's Mystery Trip to Kansas

Long Ignored by History, Comes to Light

By E. Sutton-Mattocks

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, America's greatest President, once made a secret trip to the heart of Kansas, 67 years ago, when he was 'down-and out', after suffering bitter defeat at the polls. He was then without a seat in the Senate, without a strong party backing. Why, then, did he make this long and tedious journey into a practically unknown land inhabited by few white people, many Indians, with long rolling stretches of prairie? Lincoln knew full well that, though there were an eclipse over his face and political career, the sun would yet shine and shine strongly, and that when it did he would be sleeping not in the grasses of the middle west of a huge continent, but in the White House, the goal of his ambitious dreams. That was his reason for doing an almost unheard-of thing, an act that displayed an extraordinary amount of foresight.

The historian shows that Lincoln made one journey so far west, and one only, in December, 1859. That was made, apparently, to offset the accelerated Kansas movement to put Seward into the president's chair. The secret trip Lincoln made was for very different reasons, and one which turned the tide of the middle west definitely in his favor. It had actually been made four months prior to the December trip!

Congress and the whole country were advocating a railway to cross the entire country to the Pacific Ocean. Lincoln knew that if he should be

nominated by his party, he must have definite ideas on that theme. There must be something more than slavery to talk about. He must have a feasible railroad route on his tongue if not entirely in his mind. A great conflict was impending. War clouds were gathering, thunder could be heard in the distance. Lincoln could detect the ominous signs, and, better still, could interpret them. The great question was, if civil war came, how far would the great west and middle west go? Be it remembered that "Far west", once in Caldwell County, Missouri (practically the "heart of America"), had shifted to the Golden Gate and all along the Pacific shore. The West must be bolted to the Union, and its bolthead must be north of, and not inside, the cotton states, where dwelt the majority of the slaves. How was it to be accomplished?

To qualify himself for this political campaign, that should make him victorious over his political enemies, that would as a natural consequence consolidate his nomination for the presidency, Abraham Lincoln journeyed to Kennekuk, Kansas, the ancient home of the Kickapoo Indians.

Lincoln's political enemies wanted to make Kennekuk the great railway eastern terminus of the new road to be called the Union Pacific. So it was as a railroad engineer Lincoln traveled. What did he find? The Rock Island railway worked its way among the hills not far from Kennekuk, and the St. Joseph and Grand Island performed a similar feat. But these hills were too many in number, and their grades were too steep. The Kansas approach to St. Joseph, moreover, was too low, and liable to floods, he reflected. On the other hand, the Nebraska route was over a reasonably level prairie, and Omaha would never be flooded. So Council Bluffs was decided on by the engineer-politician. Here the great railroad should end, and here the Chicago lines should meet it.

Here arose an important thought. If war came and Missouri cast in its lot with the South, the cotton states, should the railway have its terminals at St. Joseph, Missouri? He decided quickly. He slew St. Joseph as an eastern terminus of that railway. He decreed that city should not be a metropolis. He gave Kansas City preeminence over it instead. He made Omaha. He gave Chicago supremacy over St. Louis, Missouri. He eulogized Iowa and northern Illinois. He helped Nebraska and halted Kansas. He made the great American desert, so called, blossom with ten thousand meadows. He hooked Nevada and California to the Union with hooks of steel! Brilliant statesman!

Why so much secrecy about his journey? In the first place, he was politically an outcast. What contumely had been his, were his enemies in full knowledge of his movements and the reason therefor? Then, if it leaked out, what would Kansas and Missouri think of his deciding in favor of Nebraska and Iowa? What would they do when civil war came over the slavery question? Hence Lincoln clothed himself in mystery those sweltering August days, and history mentioned it not.

It would not be right to close the story without saying that Kansas and Missouri, and even St. Joseph, later received abundant recognition at the hands of the Union Pacific railroad. That great system added the Kansas Pacific as its eastern terminus, and also St. Joheph and Grand Island, which had already chosen St. Joseph as its eastern terminus. No bitterness is felt toward Lincoln today because of his choice of Council Bluffs as the eastern terminus, a choice (instead of Omaha) which the United States supreme court fixed by a decision handed down in 1876.

British Secret Service

"A Five Year Bombshell"

By C. R.—2-11

THIS was the first important case to come under my complete charge, and so you will understand my feelings when I say that it was found later to be by far the most important state affair that had been handled by the S. I. S. for many a long year. Had I made a muff of it, the results would have been calamitous for the nation. As it was, a certain high and mighty potentate was to receive probably the biggest shock of his life, just when he didn't expect it. And all because a man saw a cornet player playing on his instrument in an obscure seaside village in England.

It was the year 1911, and the English climate had graciously decided to be perfectly exquisite, a real compliment to the month of June. All seemed gloriously sunny and happy to the millions of Londoners who looked up at the sun on their way to work and play. November with its stifling pea-green fogs were forgotten, physically and metaphorically, except by the inner few whose lives were devoted to watching the undercurrents of life in the great international sense of the word—in other words, the men directing espionage and contra-espionage in behalf of the Empire. And these men were in conference on a vital matter.

"Gentlemen," it was the chief speaking in his measured tones, quite imperturbable, despite the fact that he had been recalled to his chair from a far distance without a *yea* or *nay*, just at a time when he could ill afford to leave what he was doing, and return without knowledge to any to London. For though many nations actually knew the speaker by name and sight, equally as many would willingly give a fabulous sum to know who was the chief of this inner band. Which means that nobody outside the inner few dreamed who the chief was.

"Gentlemen"—his aristocratic, martial face displayed no sign of emotion, one way or the other—"I cannot believe this report, for if it is true, the great tragedy is almost upon us." The darkened room, perched on top of an immense building within sound of Big Ben of Westminster, seemed even darker to the seven listeners. One was the head of Britain's navy secret intelligence service; another, the head of the S. I. S. of the army; and the heads of the Colonial and Civil Departments, and three others. The chief spoke on: "Perhaps the best and simplest way to explain the reason of this emergency meeting is to let Smith tell the whole story."

Smith, needless to remark, is not the name I was born with, nor do I claim it every day of my life. Sometimes, just occasionally, it does quite well. I thought the best way was to tell the facts of the case without any trimmings, so I started out right away. "On March 10th of this year Brigadier General W. H. Watkins of the War Office happened to be on vacation on the East Coast, of which I have charge. While going through the village of Frintham in Lincolnshire one day, he heard one of the numerous German bands playing out-

side a saloon. As these bands of wandering musicians are quite common in the country he paid no particular notice to them, until he glanced casually at the first cornet player's face. Somehow the man's appearance struck him as familiar, though for the life of him he couldn't place the fellow. About ten days after, while sitting at his desk at the War Office, he suddenly remembered. The man was Count Adolph von Herstberg, of the Crown Prince's Death's Head Hussars, whom he had met at the Kriegschule (war school), Berlin. The general immediately reported this to his intelligence branch, who placed the matter in the central department's hands. I have ascertained the following: There are seventeen such bands of strolling musicians in the country, nine of which are on the East Coast between Newcastle and Dover. Each of these bands has a German General Staff Officer or a brilliant engineer officer of the German Army playing an instrument. These officers are carrying out an extensive and intensive reconnoissance of the entire east coast with the object of preparing complete plans for an attempt at a landing and invasion in the event of war."

There was dead silence as I stopped speaking. Not even the full significance of this statement could make even a muscle quiver on the faces of the listeners. Then the head of the Civil Department answered the unspoken question: "No action has yet been taken."

No one really was surprised at this statement, for the motto of the S. I. S. was "Watch and take care of the devil you know, rather than have to hunt for the devil you don't." Many a spy has lived for years doing his work, blissfully unconscious of the fact that his every act has been under supervision all the time. Many a time, too, he or she has been used as a pawn against his own country.

Again the Chief spoke: "This is an exceedingly serious matter if Smith is correct. But the great question in my mind is, where is the money coming from to pay for all this? From the information given us by our agents in Germany, and from what I know myself, there are no government funds to admit of such a large expenditure. The Navy League, while it has given a good deal, is very short of funds at this moment, and the Reichstag only the other day, in secret session, refused to vote any further moneys for this work. And this sort of thing cannot be done on air alone."

Here I interrupted: "I have my own theory, Sir, but would rather wait until my suspicions are confirmed. In the meantime I am having Jones here go over to Germany to arrange a little matter."

"Very good," replied the Chief, "is there anything you want any of us to do?"

"Nothing at present, Sir, except to have Scotland Yard pick up two of them temporarily on a charge of vagrancy or attempted burglary or something, while we go through their belongings. They have been too clever to let us do it so far."

"All right; Sir Basil will do that, I am sure. In the meantime, gentlemen, keep on watch for anything that may help Smith."

The party dispersed singly into the warm, bright sunlight, strangely incongruous by comparison with each man's thoughts. My own were inclined to run riot. "This cold, calculating, machine-like preparation for man-killing in times of peace and harmony certainly does not tend to make one frisky with joy. Still, there's enough excitement in it to please the most blasé. Glory! but I hope I pull this off like I want to."

I never dreamt then how far-reaching were to be the results of my activities of those and the following months. And what of the thoughts of an emperor, when he found Perfidious Albion snatch away his trump card right out of his hand, at the most crucial time?

It is impossible to give in detail the real work of our corps, how it is done, or by whom; but in my next episode, "Smashing the Post-offices," a very important piece of work which showed how carefully we observed our motto, I shall let the reader more into the secret of the inner activities of the Service, who comprise the force, and the duties allotted to them. But to get on with the present story: I had been on this particular job exactly fourteen weeks, and had been much more successful than my brains warranted. Luck is something to be thankful for. In that time, with but the two exceptions quoted above, and they were really the most important, and consequently the most difficult to get at, I had been able, through my agents and by other methods, to get on friendly terms with all of the pseudo musicians. For instance, one of the bands was hired for ten days to play at one of the village fairs, and were housed in one of the local taverns. What was easier than to search their baggage while they were playing on the village green? What was easier than to put a little something strong in their light beer which they always drank before going to bed, so that we could find out later on in the night whether they carried anything that would be interesting on their personal clothing or under their pillows? Nothing that I am aware of, for we did it quite easily, and they were not a bit the wiser. Another instance: One of the bands unwittingly trespassed on some private property. Nothing would have been said normally, for they were not out to commit burglary or anything like that. But a very officious policeman took them all to the lock-up, and kept them there for thirty-six hours. The policeman was a bad man, and did wrong, assuredly; but what could the bandsmen say about it? Nothing. And the policeman never lost his job over it, either. Such incidents as these were all part of the day's work, and gradually the net was spread larger and larger as other men-fish, and women-fish for that matter, became enmeshed. And all the time the sun shone, and sleepy old England looked and acted just the same. She played her cricket and tennis, went boating and yachting, studied the newspapers and soundly berated Parliament for its extravagance in one way or another. And so the game went on. Two more emergency meetings were held in the darkened room, the first to bring affairs up to date, the second because of a very important and unexpected turn of events—unexpected, that is, to all except the Chief and myself. It was the impending visit, incognito as Prince William of Prussia, of his imperial majesty the German Emperor. And Prince William was not coming over to take part in any festivities; he was merely going to spend a few days for the benefit of his health with his old friend, Lord Avonmouth, the first lord of the Admiralty. Why should Prince William choose to stay with the first naval lord, the man who knew most about the British Navy, when he could very easily have stayed with half a dozen other friends—even the royal family? It wasn't hard to answer the query: To find out all he could about British naval plans. He got them, though not quite in the way he expected.

When a king travels incognito, he seldom takes a large staff with him. We were not surprised, however, to find four of the biggest men in Ger-

many in his suite—representing his army, navy, his mercantile marine, and his secret service. What slightly nonplussed us was the prince's, shall we call it audacity, in bringing this well-known and formidable group over with him to take a rest cure also. Probably he imagined we were dead from the toes up. What did really surprise us was his three-days' strenuous motor tour, at a time we least expected it. Luckily the chauffeur of the Rolls-Royce ordered at a moment's notice was one of our agents, otherwise we would have had to do quite a lot of guesswork. Strange how luck enters into the great game. That incident was to confirm many of the words we thought would fit into the cross-word puzzle. But to continue: Prince William, immediately he arrived, showed he was not over for a holdiday, but business. He pumped question after question into Lord Avonmouth about the navy. He asked all about the army, and political conditions all over the Empire, particularly Ireland and the home provinces. When I think of some of the answers he received I have to smile. We would never have dared to bluff him to the extent we did only for the fact that we knew all about the postoffices. And he went away feeling that he was shortly to witness the decline and fall of the British Empire, and himself as goodness knows what?

All this time Jones had been over in Germany laying his little eggs with the assistance of our agents over there, and waiting for them to hatch. Seven weeks short of one day after the regal rest cure had ended, he walked into my sanctum and without a word placed a package in my hands. I broke open the seals with fingers that trembled, I confess. As I undid the wrappings and exposed a series of photostatic copies of plans and correspondence, I knew he had done his job, and done it well. "Congratulations! If it isn't too rude a question to hurl at you right away, how much did you pay for these things?"

"Fifteen hundred pounds."

I sat for a minute, calculating up. "I should imagine it has cost us about thirty thousand pounds to obtain what the other side spent over a quarter of a million to do. And I'd gamble a thousand dollars to a doughnut that half of it came out of the private purse of one William."

The papers in my hand were copies of the German War Staff plans for the landing and invasion of England in the event of war. It was the most exhaustive and comprehensive document I have ever seen in my life. It contained a survey of the entire coastline within any sort of striking distance of London. Every road, lane, bridge, culvert, railroad, embankment, houses, barns, stores, wells, and the thousand-and-one requirements for a thorough and systematic plan of invasion and attack were embodied in it. Places for concrete beds for guns; locations for Zeppelin sheds and flying fields; isolation camps for refugees and prisoners; casualty clearing stations and temporary hospitals; even a floating dock to repair damaged ships. Nothing had been left out, except the possibility of some unauthorized person or persons having a good look at the plans. By which I mean that the papers in my hand were palpably genuine and not fake. Three alternative landing places for the attack or attacks had been chosen, and the reason for the three days' tour, which we had guessed at, became authentically correct. The Prince had come over to study the ground at first hand, after perusing the plans, and with his advisers had chosen the points of attack. Very clever.

This seems to be the end of the story, but it isn't, quite. The papers

were pigeonholed until 1916, when it became apparent that an invasion of England was in process of formation. The Navy at Kiel was being keyed up; two marine divisions and some of the finest divisions of the German Army were being concentrated around the Kiel canal and training for their new job; transports were being held in readiness to rush them over to swamp the East Coast and march on to London. And so it was about time to act.

About two weeks before the attack would probably have taken place, I told Jones he might have copies of his copies back again, and I told him what to do with them. Within three days the War Lord received a polite message to the effect that we had no further use for certain papers which had been pigeonholed since 1911, and that he would perhaps be glad of the opportunity of perusing them.

The invasion never took place. Perfidious Albion!

Forty Thousand Miles of Friends

By Thomas J. Malone

JOSEPH T. MANNIX of Minnesota, Pacific points and the Far East is back in the United States after a try at the record for the longest time ever spent by a carefree traveler in going round the earth. Jules Verne's hero made the circuit in eighty days, the world flight took just three hundred and sixty-five flying hours, but Mr. Mannix has been at it more than eight years and still has some distance to go.

Probably the world's greatest exemplar of imperturbable deliberateness, he has been indulging a lifelong propensity to saunter about making friends. Making friends and being a friend have been his chief avocation; in his leisurely meanderings in foreign parts he has been an unofficial ambassador of friendship.

At sixty, many men are content to slip gently into the stage of the "lean and slippered pantaloon," narrowing their circle of activities, making few if any new friends, sticking close to home, puttering through a calm and uneventful old age. Not so "Joe" Mannix, knight of Chance, steaming from Seattle, back in 1917, on a world tour over by-trails. Ever since a world journey he had made some twenty years before, the hum of rigging had sung invitingly in his ears. He had retired from active vocation, was single, had leisure; so why not?

With no fixed purpose, he set out to indulge a desire to visit the cities of men, meet new faces and make new friends. Why the hurry?—haste makes waste—make haste slowly—the more haste, the less speed—"why so hot, little man?" These and such wise saws had influenced him so long that he had become an embodiment of their purport. His travel habit has been much like the habit of some persons in using dictionary or encyclopedia: he may start out for Suez and end up at Sydney. One thing leads to another, that to something else; and how fascinating this old earth is, anyhow, what a lot of interesting people there are in it and how friendly they are to strangers if strangers are friendly to them!

It took him six years or so to tear himself away from the China coast, but he is somewhere in the eastern United States, at this writing, mov-

ing slowly toward Minneapolis, his home town, with prospects good for reaching it some time in 1926—unless he turns back for one more game of billiards in Kowloon or Geelong.

No emissary of business seeking foreign concessions or bent on exploitation, with no governmental mission and no zeal to inform or reform, this friend-maker has been easing about China, Japan, Borneo, Ceylon, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Egypt, and going a somewhat faster pace through Siberia and Europe, gratifying a consuming interest in the other fellow: how he lives, what he thinks, what he wears, how he worships, his amusements, ambitions, singularities, joys and sorrows.

Mr. Mannix went to Minneapolis in the late seventies from northern New York. He had learned the printer's trade and thereafter, for thirty years or more, worked at the case or as reporter for Twin City newspapers until his appointment as state expert printer. That position he filled for ten years, having supervision of the printing of all state publications. It is not claimed for him that, as a printer, he never mis-set a headline or pied a form, and that, as a reporter, he never was scooped or that he wrote the world's greatest news story; but it is said of him that he knew more persons in Minneapolis and Saint Paul by their first names, and lent more money to impecunious colleagues, than any other newspaper man who has held forth in either city. Though he himself is modest about his achievements, he probably has a like extensive list of first-name acquaintances—and possibly debtors—in a score of countries in the Old World, especially in Asia, where he has lingered longest.

It is tradition in Twin City newspaperdom that "Joe'" Mannix would always stand for a "touch." Whatever the size of his own pay check, he seemed to have at all times a little cash to spare for a friend in distress. Newspaper men are proverbially, or used to be, rovers—here one day and gone the next—and Joe found it hard to place some of them with surety after they had gone a-wandering; but none ever forgot how to reach him. He would get a telegram from, say, Detroit, reading:

"Joe, send me fifteen dollars. —Frank."

He would ponder that message. "Now," he might confide to his desk neighbor, "I just don't know who sent this. There's Frank Pewter, but he went to Cincinnati, I believe. Maybe it's Frank Brass. Yes, I guess I'll take a chance and send it to Brass. Poor Frank is probably in trouble and this will help him out. Funny that I can't keep track of those boys."

It is even told that once, after a message, he sent money out to two different Franks lest the one needing it might be overlooked and suffer. The story is probably malicious and a libel: but how few friends of that stripe there are on the planet! What part of the loans was ever repaid, Joe keeps to himself; to him they were hostages to friendship.

With his propensity for friendship have gone an admirable nonchalance, a profound self-control, an astounding imperturbability. A police reporter during most of his newspaper days, no fire and no crime ever upset his habitual calm. Fastidious in dress, gay and debonair in demeanor, he was at all the fires and in at the major captures, and at court trials and, yes, hangings, but he never let excitement get the better of sang-froid. Poise, that's it, poise! That may explain his partiality for the Chinese, a people whom he loves and has specially cultivated. Have they not the same calmness of exterior,

the same imperturbability, the same genius for friendship, the same penchant for flowery speech—for a leaning to large and periodic discourse is strikingly Mannixian?

No one has ever professed to have seen Joseph T. Mannix perturbed, no matter what the provocation. Way back in the eighties or nineties, he was climbing the stairs in a downtown building to his lodging three flights up, after his shift as a night reporter. It was about three in the morning, and the stairway was dark. Economy ruled landlords in that gaslight age. He was alone. Before he reached his floor, he heard above him a peculiar breathing. It wasn't a wheeze and it wasn't a snuffle. He called out; there was no reply. Thinking some poor fellow might be in straits, he went on, again calling out. Then he felt his shoulders grasped as by two hands. He reached out, his fingers closing on a fur coat. That was puzzling, for it was summer. The owner of the coat resisted and Joe realized it was some kind of beast he had to deal with. What his feelings were for a fraction of a minute, or second, one may only guess, for he never divulged later. He dragged the creature down the stairs and out into the street, the main street in the heart of the town.

It was a bear, a tame one. Its captor led it to an all-night messenger service office, the only place that would be active at that hour, for Minneapolis was a small city then. In a jiffy that office was deserted of manager and messengers. Then Joe and the bear walked up the street, a clear way before them. With the dawn breaking, he prodded bruin up a light pole, while he sat down on the curb to run over the morning paper. When through, he permitted the bear to come down, gave it a few casual toe pokes, and the animal shuffled off and away.

There have been rumors that the bear's visit was not so accidental as it seemed, that it was planned and put on by certain of Joe's friends in the Press Club who had laid a wager that he could be jolted out of his sang-froid by the sufficiently unexpected. If this were so, the would-be jolters lost that wager.

Joe Mannix would do anything for a friend. One night he appeared at the scene of a fire to find a friend out in front of the burning building in a high state of excitement and consternation. The friend had been routed out of his lodging on the fourth floor before he could save any belongings. Firemen would not let him return. Particularly did he bewail a costly diamond stud which he had left in a shirt. A ladder had been placed to that floor. Joe climbed it, as a privileged character with the firemen, somehow recovered the shirt and came down. The stud was in the shirt. The floor fell, of course, as he reached the ground.

His friend-making and friend-serving bent helps to account for the placidity and joyousness that mark his peregrinations over the globe. Taking life easy, being in no hurry, he proceeds to get acquainted with folks in any new place as the first of desirable acts. If in an Asiatic city, his immediate objective is the white population and, of it, to begin with, his brothers of the press. He will cultivate the natives later. In such cities the newspapers printed in English are the Mecca for Joseph T. Mannix.

Into a news-room in Peking, Ceylon, Singapore, enters a man much resembling Mark Twain in appearance. He is erect, deliberate. His flowing white mane and old-time sweeping white mustache attract instant attention. Perhaps they create an interest approaching awe. One

can imagine his making an introduction like this:

"I'm an old tramp printer far from home, and I just dropped in for a chat with you newspaper boys."

"Old tramp printers" seldom crash the gates of newspaper city rooms faultlessly attired, impeccably groomed and with flower in buttonhole. Is he welcome? Isn't he, though! Many of the men on those staffs are expatriates like himself, out seeing the world, gathering information and experience, rolling from coast to coast, yearning for something new to "break"!

No travel story is complete without the comment, "The world is not so large after all," and an illustration to cap it. In a certain Chinese city is a bridge with a reputation of being a bad place at night, dangerous for pedestrians. Quite likely there are such bridges in various Chinese cities, but this story is about a particular man. Mr. Mannix had been warned not to cross it after dark alone. To him that was a challenge to attempt it, which he did the first night after his arrival.

"The bridge was poorly lighted and a lonesome place," he wrote in a letter home. "But I was half-way across without having seen any one, when a form loomed up approaching me on my side. I had no weapon. I picked up a stone and put it in a pocket; maybe I kept a hand on it. When I stooped for the stone, the man crossed to the other side. He didn't seem aggressive, and it occurred to me that he was as badly scared as I was. On this hunch, I called out: 'No need to be afraid of me; I mean no harm. My name's Mannix.' The man called back: 'Well, the only Mannix I know is Joseph T. Mannix of Minneapolis.'"

The man was a former Minnesotan, sojourning in the East.

How can a man spend eight years away from home in just going round sight-seeing and friend-making? Ask Mannix. This incident is suggestive. He was staying at an English hotel in Kowloon, near Hongkong. Liked the hotel, liked the hotel proprietor, liked the town, liked the people, liked the line of guests. He lingered. For one who plays billiards, as he does, what a place that was to play billiards in! The proprietor's manager was taken sick or left him or something. Would Mr. Mannix be so kind as to help manage in the emergency? Mr. Mannix would and did—did so successfully that, for the first time in years, the proprietor thought it would be safe for him to go on a trip to Peking, leaving a substitute in charge. So he went; and there was Mine Host Mannix showing southern China how to run the perfect hotel—calm Joe Mannix, considerate, anticipative, debonair, deliberate and imperturbable, always imperturbable, which is just what a good hotel man anywhere has to be.

In his journeying he has avoided the main routes and the standard methods of travel. Passenger boats filled with professional tourists, or amateurs booked for set tours, attract him not; but small freighters going roundabout ways between out-of-the-way ports have been his delight. Captains of such boats are his friends from Vancouver to Good Hope, salty old tars who welcome a lone passenger whose speech and manner will beguile the tedium of voyaging. He knows the deck hands, too, and majestic mandarins in Chinese cities, coolies and rickshaw boys, and—

At a farewell and God-speed dinner given him before he set out on this globe meandering, Mr. Mannix voiced this sentiment, summarizing a fairly active life:

"I haven't made money, but I have made friends."

Guarding Wild Game

By N. E. Paul

FOR the enforcement of the Mexican decree giving ten years of protection to all mountain sheep and prong-horned antelope, Mexico has had Ben H. Tinker, of Tucson, Arizona, appointed as game warden in Sonora. This Mexican state lies to the south of Arizona and furnishes a unique field that has attracted W. T. Hornaday and other naturalists who delight in studying wild game. In the past many American hunters have poured into this section of Mexico every season to hunt.

Mr. Tinker knows the sheep country of Mexico the best of all living men, it is believed. He has lived on this border of Mexico and Arizona all his life. His grandfather came to Arizona in 1859, making the trip by horseback from Connecticut.

A position such as this calls for a man of wide experience who has spent years in this desert country and knows how to rustle for himself. Tinker's knowledge of the location of water holes has saved his life on many an occasion. He has faced death more than once, but with a calm coolness that has won out. On a trip in 1923 into a mountain range called Sierra Rosario, that lies out in an immense field of sand and 65 miles from water, Mr. Tinker and his Indian were three nights and two days without water. On that occasion he lost seven of his pack and saddle horses from thirst between this range and the camp, though he knew that in this stretch there were two *tinajas*, or waterholes, containing water. The sun in this region is especially fierce. It seems to suck every drop of moisture from the body of any person exposed to its rays. Both Mr. Tinker and the Indian recovered and stayed out three months on this trip. They found that this range went into some virgin game country. The first day they saw 56 mountain sheep.

"Whenever I use pack animals," says Mr. Tinker, "I have to consider carefully the question of food and water. The presence of water often determines the location of a settlement. I have in mind a little band of Seri Indians who live near the mouth of the Rio San Ignacio. That is often a river in name only. These Indians are semi cannibals. They live in a primitive state, dressing only in a breech cloth made of the skins of wild animals that they have killed with clubs. There are only about eighty of these Indians left, as ill health is killing many of them off. I am friendly with them as my work takes me near their camps often. About fifteen miles east and up the river I have established a camp at Arivipi, where I get my water by digging about six feet in the sandy river bed.

"This is the southern boundary of the patrol. The northern part is the dryest. There is a triangular piece of my territory that is 160 miles wide and 2,400 miles long. It does not contain a living soul except myself and my Indian packer. Water here is very scarce, and during a dry year there is likely to be dependable water in only three places in the whole territory. I have to pack water 65 miles in one place and 80 miles in another. I pack my water in five-gallon cans made especially for this purpose. On

long trips I often have ten to twelve horses that carry nothing but water.

"A year or two ago I picked up a lone white prospector, about 60 miles north of Tinajas Altas. He had been without water for over two days and had gone crazy. He had lost his pack burros and was naked when I found him.

"Between the Papago well and the Tinaja of Cabeza Prieta on the old Camino del Diablo, or Devil's Road, there are five graves of prospectors who have died of thirst. The road was used by the gold miners of '49 en route to California. *Tinajas* are nothing more than deep holes worn by ing more than deep holes worn by erosion in the rock canyon beds. They fill up with rainwater during the short desert rains. One of these *tinajas* lies 90 feet up a steep granite mountain-side; you must pull yourself up with a piece of wire cable that is fastened into the rock with a rock drill.

"As for feed, bronches or mules relish the leaves of the *palo fierro,* or ironwood tree. They much prefer its dark green, juicy leaves to the galleta grass. They stretch their necks like giraffes, each trying to get the biggest mouthful, and they seem to pay little attention to the numerous thorns. The Mexicans usually cut down large branches so that the pack animals can feed the better. To the fellow that travels in the desert, the *palo ferro* is the most useful of trees, The man who gathers wood for the camp-fire makes for it first of all.

"The Mexicans call the sand dunes *medanos.* That name is given to the whole region along the upper part of the Gulf east of the Colorado. This name has a mystic sound. In the summer it suggests stifling heat, intense dryness, restless rattlesnakes. In the winter it speaks of cold winds, bewildering fogs, drizzling rains. Most Mexicans give a significant shrug of their shoulders whenever you mention *los Medanos* to them. They know too well the troubles met in crossing them. They tell remarkable stories of fabulous wealth in gold and silver to be found in these sand dunes.

"In the volcanic regions are to be found the mountain sheep. This animal is at a great disadvantage on level ground, as a horse at a good gallop can run it down all right, but don't try any stunt like that when you strike rough going. In the volcanic craters, where the cinders are slippery, the mountain sheep can readily lose any pursuer. Pretty soon you will see him grinning at you from a secure position on a distant cliff.

"It's an easy matter to make out the prong-horned antelope while they are feeding among the greasewoods alone. This is because of their color. This, in the main, is a light reddish brown, but then the legs and body have quite a bit of white. The other vegetation in this region gives them much protection. The choya cactus is of a whitish color, and often of a funny shape. At a distance you might swear it was an antelope. There are lots of old crags and boulders and branches that at some distance look for all the world like horns or prongs. We have done much in the protection work. We have certainly kept the mountain sheep and prong-horned antelope from being killed unlawfully."

It is in this strange corner of Mexico, hemmed in on all sides by active lines of travel and yet so silent that it seems another world by itself, that the new warden is operating. With some energetic and seasoned men like Tinker on the job, one of the world's greatest wild game regions will have a chance to develop within a short distance of the international boundary between Mexico and the United States.

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By Frederick Bending

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